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MONK OF MONK'S OWN.

VOL. II.

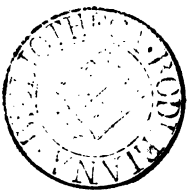
MONK OF MONK'S OWN.

A Novel.

By LEGH KNIGHT,
AUTHOR OF "TONIC BITTERS."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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MONK OF MONK'S OWN.

CHAPTER I.

ARNOLD'S absence soon proved that his influence over Edmund had been of a beneficial nature. Nothing seemed now to arouse the slightest spark of intellect in the boy, and he sank into a condition of apathetic vacancy. He was, at the same time, growing so tall and manly, and in spite of the want of expression in his face, so strikingly handsome, that his mental deficiencies were becoming more distressingly apparent. Though he was always contented and happy in Lottie's society, and was often fretful and unmanageable at other times, the pain of seeing so fine a young man satisfied with childish

pursuits often made Sissie think she would rather he were without the companionship of his little cousin. He would not be induced to associate with any one else, until Sissie, remembering that he formerly had a boyish admiration for Sophie Rice, began to cultivate a more intimate acquaintance with Sophie, in order to try whether this admiration could be renewed sufficiently to have the effect of rousing the lethargic faculties.

The success of the experiment far exceeded Sissie's hopes, even her desires. At first Edmund only stared at Sophie, but for him to fix his eyes steadily on any object was something gained. After one or two visits to Monk's Own, Sophie's natural coquetry overcame the shyness at first inspired by Edmund's affliction, and she began to exert her powers of fascination on him, as she would have done on any other young man. Edmund did not prove insensible; by degrees he showed signs of following what she said,

and even of having some half-formed wish to answer her. Sophie was proud of her success, and made every effort to carry it still farther. There seemed, however, a point beyond which there could be no advance. After a little time the steady gaze, which had appeared to Sissie so favourable a symptom, gave place to a shy, furtive glance occasionally cast at Sophie, and immediately withdrawn, at the same time that a crimson flush would dye the boy's cheeks and forehead. Between Sophie's visits he grew more than ever restless and irritable, and would often wander away from home, and be found outside the gates of the Hermitage, only half conscious and entirely unmanageable.

This was the state of things with poor Edmund when, at the beginning of April, all the families in Monk's Kirk and the neighbourhood were invited by Mr. Preston to a large picnic luncheon at Monk's Bay, the nearest point of coast to the village.

Two months before, there would have been no question of Edmund being of the party, but Sophie having asked him if she should meet him there, he so set his heart upon going that no one dared to thwart him. Arnold was expected home the day before that fixed for the entertainment, and Sissie half persuaded herself that the pleasure she felt at the prospect of seeing him was due to the certainty that Edmund would be in good hands on this inevitably trying occasion.

A perfect spring morning, and a gallop over the downs with Herbert, made Sissie reach the meeting-place in such bright looks and spirits, that Lucy, who as Arnold's return drew near, had been indulging in a slight relapse, thought it necessary to take her aside and prepare her for the intelligence that Arnold had not yet arrived at Kirklands.

"Oh, what a pity!" cried Sissie, so unconcernedly that Lucy felt she had wasted her

consideration; "how disappointed Mr. and Mrs. Preston must be!"

When Edmund appeared in the wagonette with his father, Miss Colquhoun, and Clement, Sissie allowed herself to feel that *she* also was disappointed. But Lucy did not know of this, and therefore was left to sigh sentimentally over the blind fate which bestowed on one who could not value it what would be of such value to another.

The weather being still too windy for an out-of-door's luncheon, the table was spread in a large dry barn, belonging to one of Mr. Preston's tenants, whose farm had nestled itself up to the walls of a ruined castle, which stood on the cliff overlooking the bay. In spite of some little uneasiness on Arnold's account, the party was a very merry one. Mrs. Preston, now that greater intimacy with her neighbours had thawed the slight covering of girlish shyness which had at first concealed the natural

gaiety of her disposition, was full of whimsical fancies and merry pranks. Her husband always treated her much as an over-indulgent father treats a spoilt child, and his appearance of perfect enjoyment—only interrupted by an occasional sigh of "I wish we had the boy!"—did much to spread a sense of enjoyment over all the others.

Sophie Rice was in her element. She had a most difficult piece of diplomacy on her hands, and she was managing it with consummate skill. Since the ball at Kirklands—when Arnold's invulnerability to her charms had been proved beyond a doubt—Wilfred had held the position of the most favoured lover, and poor Walter had retired into parish work and low spirits. Latterly, however, Edmund had been made the first object, and Wilfred had shown alarming symptoms of resenting the change in his fortunes, and of treating his tormentor with mortifying indifference. Now all these dis-

cordant strings had to be drawn together, and held with such a steady hand that neither should clash against the others. The first move was accomplished on the way from Monk's Kirk, when Sophie publicly chose Wilfred for her companion, and made such good use of the two hours' walk, that on reaching Monk's Bay it was evident that she had regained an ardent and hopeful lover. The Monk's Own party not having then arrived, Walter was the next to be got into proper order. A scramble down to the beach sufficed for this, Walter being so amiable that a few penitent words made him forget all the slights he had received, and so humble-minded that one tender look, and one expression of warm interest, appeared to him an evidence of favour so much beyond his deserts, that he hailed it as the earnest of better things to come. On the arrival of the waggonette, a glance, a soft pressure of the hand, and a few low-spoken words were

enough to throw Edmund into a mood of the most submissive devotion.

Of course the management of each admirer singly was comparatively easy. When they had to be confronted in a body, then came the difficulty. But Sophie proved equal to the occasion. She contrived to place herself between Walter and Edmund, with Wilfred directly opposite. Apparently her almost exclusive attention was bestowed upon Edmund, but a few half-whispered remarks to Walter, on "the poor boy," and a hint of sacrificing pleasure to duty, made it impossible for the kind-hearted young man not to approve of such consideration for his former pupil; and every word to the others was balanced by a glance at Wilfred, of which the two at her side were necessarily quite unconscious.

Whilst Sophie Rice was enjoying this triumph over difficulties which would have crushed a less practised coquette, her brother Stephen had a triumph of his own. He had

lately become the professed admirer of Laura Monk, who seemed inclined to be more appreciative of the honour than her cousin had been. Sissie was now placed exactly opposite to this couple, and, as she was between Mr. Preston, who was too intent on hospitable cares to speak to her, and Mr. Rice, whose conversation was too distasteful to her for her to speak to him, Stephen was convinced that she was feeling neglected, and must be regretfully envious of his attention to Laura.

Before the party separated to amuse themselves among the ruins, and on the beach, Sir Percy rose, and, in a graceful speech, proposed the health of their host.

"No, no," muttered Mr. Preston, turning to Sissie with a very red face, and in his excitement forgetting even his usual vague knowledge of the English language, "I don't want none of that. It ain't fair of your good father to be sticking *me* up for a cock-shy."

As Sir Percy proceeded, however, he became deeply interested, and quite forgetting his personal concern in what was said, shouted "Hear! hear!" at every telling point and well-turned compliment. His self-consciousness returned, and produced another remonstrance, when Sir Percy, in contrasting, or rather comparing, the former lords of the castle with its present owner, said that the physical valour, which was *their* chief boast, was well represented—he would not say replaced—by the moral valour, born of intelligence and energy, which was the glory of such men as he who was now causing this dead memorial of a past age to be alive with all the exuberant life of the present age.

"He is wrong there!" cried Mr. Preston, at the word "intelligence." "I wasn't born with any intelligence. I was the dullest boy at Sunday school, and now I am the dullest man in the Riding. Much

obliged to you, sir, all the same," he added, as Sir Percy left off speaking. "Your father does know how to put the words together," turning with a delightful face to Sissie. "It was for all the world like a printed book."

"You must return thanks, Mr. Preston."

"Very well. Here goes. Thank you all, ladies and gentlemen, for your good wishes, and thank you all for coming here to-day. If our boy was here, as he ought to be, he'd have been able to say something fit to say in answer to all the pretty things my good neighbour here has said of me. But though he was kind enough to talk about intelligence, I haven't got enough of it to know how to make a speech; so the long and the short of it is, ladies and gentlemen, my wife and I are very much obliged to you."

Sir Percy's allusion to the former lords of the castle had given a fresh interest to the crumbling walls, and on leaving the table

the whole party with one consent began to explore the ruins. Now that Mr. Preston was satisfied that the wants of all his guests had been supplied, he was a very agreeable companion, and quite belied his own words by the intelligent manner in which he traced out the old foundations, and the probable history of each portion of the castle. Sophie, surrounded by her three admirers, was seated on a part of the wall which overlooked the sea, and as Sissie and her companion passed this group, it was evident that they also were occupied with the past.

"Life must have been much pleasanter in those days," Sophie was saying; "at any rate for ladies. See what power they had. They had only to express a wish, and devoted knights would fly to execute it. How different it is now."

The three who were hanging on the little coquette's words answered to this

challenge according to their several characters. Edmund's face flushed, and his eyes glowed, as Sissie had never before seen them glow since his illness. Walter looked hurt, and said, in a pained voice, "I think you misjudge the men of the present day, Sophie." Wilfred bent low, and whispered something, which Sissie thought must be, "Try me."

"Come," exclaimed Sophie, "we will try whether a test, which would have been nothing to a knight of old, is not too much for the gallantry of the present day. Do you see that vessel in the bay? I have a great desire to know her name. What gallant knight will gratify my wish? There is a boat on the beach. But, remember, the knights of old fought in *single* combat."

Before she had finished speaking, the three addressed had acted on her words, and were making their way out of the castle towards the cliff. Sissie did not feel

alarmed for Edmund, for she was certain that the Blighs would not let him run any risk.

"That's a pretty piece of folly," was Mr. Preston's remark, as he and Sissie continued their survey.

An hour later, when the more prudent people were beginning to talk of going home, Sissie met Walter Bligh, and asked him, laughingly, who had been out to learn the collier's name.

"It was utterly impossible," returned Walter, in an injured tone. "It would have been simple suicide. There is a strong sea, and this shore is full of rocks. Even Wilfred shook his head at the idea, and when a sailor gave in, what could a poor landsman do?"

It appeared, however, as if the sailor had been able to excuse himself better than the landsman, for Wilfred and Sophie were starting off most amicably in the back seat

of the Rectory chaise, Mrs. Rupert and her father occupying the front seat.

"Where is Edmund?" was the cry, when the Monk's Own waggonette came round from the farm stables. Sir Percy had walked on with Walter Bligh, and Lucy was to take his seat in the carriage. Sissie began to feel rather uneasy, and, every one else being occupied in their preparations for departure, she went again on to the walls, to see if Edmund were anywhere within sight. From her look-out she saw the various parties on their road homeward—the Rectory chaise toiling up the hill, Mr. Boyd's gig disappearing over the summit, her father and Walter crossing the moor to the left, Stephen Rice's dog-cart just starting from the farm—but there was no solitary figure anywhere. Then she turned towards the sea. There lay the collier, as she had lain all the afternoon, tossed up and down a good deal by the waves, but otherwise appearing to

have no life about her. But there was a sign of life approaching her, which there had not been before—a dark speck on the water—evidently the boat Sissie had seen on the beach. A sudden fear seized upon Sissie. Before she had actually realised what it was that she feared, she had scrambled down the ruin, and was standing on the edge of the cliff. She could see the boat more plainly now. There was one figure in it, rowing feebly, and with ill-directed strokes. Sissie scrambled on down the cliff, down a path which, at any other time, she would have only thought safe for a goat. Half-way down she stopped, and looked again, for looking was impossible during her perilous descent. The boat was rolling and pitching in an alarming manner, and the rower was Edmund. A few more downward steps—more rapid even than before—and the path which Sissie was following disappeared at the edge of a sheer precipice. With a

desperate clutch at a few surrounding bushes, Sissie saved herself from falling ov and clinging thus, unable to retrace her steps' and fearing every moment that her hold would not endure, she watched, in helpless despair, her brother's equally helpless efforts.

Suddenly a voice sounded from underneath, calm and authoritative:

"Stay where you are, Sissie! I will save him."

It was Arnold's voice. With the fresh strength inspired by fresh hope, Sissie scrambled upwards a few feet, and found a safer resting-place, whilst for a moment she stopped to see what Arnold would do. Her heart beat high—less with fear than with a kind of joy in such noble daring—as she saw Arnold hastily pull off his coat, waistcoat, and boots, and, springing on to a rock which jutted out from the shore, plunge into the waves. Sissie lingered no longer then, but scrambled up the cliff, shrieking with all her voice as she went.

Her cries were not heard, but at the farm she found Mr. Preston, who, with the farm-labourers and his own servants, immediately hurried to the beach. Mr. Preston and Sissie followed, clinging together, and each trying to encourage the other, in spite of her own sickening dread. When they came in sight of the sea, Arnold had reached the boat, and Sissie felt that Edmund was saved, though, in reality, the danger was then greater than ever, for Edmund had dropped one oar, and the boat, having struck upon a sharp rock, was rapidly filling with water. The anxious watchers could do nothing. They saw Arnold's efforts to get free of the sunken rocks—they saw how he controlled Edmund's helplessness, and kept him hard at work, baling the water out with his hat. But all this time the boat was drifting farther and farther away, and the possibility of rescue was becoming more and more faint.

"Oh! call to him to save himself!" gasped Sissie, catching hold of Mr. Preston's arm.

"And leave your brother? My boy would not do that," was the answer, in a hoarse, choking voice.

"Noa use to troi an swim in noo," remarked the farmer; "the waves be toa high. They'd bea daash'd toa pieces loike."

At that moment there was a stir in the collier. The cheerful sound of weighing the anchor was borne across the waters, one or two sails were hoisted, and the formerly inert mass began to move.

"Oh, they might do something!" sobbed Sissie.

"They bea doing summat," replied the farmer.

By that time the boat had drifted far to the left. Experienced eyes could see that in a very few more minutes she must go down. Arnold had now laid aside his oar, and was evidently making every exertion to get rid

of the water which was sinking them. Sissie could not see all this as the seafaring men did, but her eyes were fastened on the boat in a despairing gaze, and she hardly felt more despairing when the boat disappeared, and there only remained two dark specks struggling with the waves.

"Toake heart, ma'am," said the farmer to Mrs. Preston; "they'll have them yet."

Then for the first time Sissie observed that the collier had been sailing after the sinking boat, and in another minute it was evident that the two specks—now merged in one speck—were making for the help which was slowly approaching them. In this moment of agonising suspense no one on the shore noticed that the objects they were watchnig had drifted almost out of sight, until suddenly, first the collier and then those she was trying to save, disappeared behind the projecting arm of the bay. The group on the beach

looked at each other in speechless dismay for a few minutes; then the farmer said, "Thoi'll loikely make for Cheddle," and at the word Mr. Preston caught his wife in one hand and Sissie in the other, and hurried back to the farm. To take their places in one of the waiting-carriages was the work of a very few minutes, and soon the impatient horses were speeding, with dangerous rapidity, along the rough road to Cheddle.

From this road the sea was not visible, and an hour of suspense had to be endured before the little harbour was reached. Here all was quiet, and the few fishermen loitering about the shore knew nothing of a collier. Presently, however, a sharp little boy announced that such a vessel was to be seen from the cliff, tacking against the wind, and presently a slight stir in the place was caused by the look-out at the Preventive Service station reporting that a vessel had signalled for a boat. This was a hopeful sound to

the three anxious hearts on the little jetty, and with reviving spirits they saw the boat put off. As it did so, the collier came in sight, slowly working its way with the help of the tide. The sea here was much calmer than in Monk's Bay, and the boat made good progress. Two dark figures were seen to descend from the side of the collier, and then the Cheddle men rowed back with vigorous strokes, whilst the collier hoisted all her sails, and was soon out of sight.

As the boat drew near, Mr. Preston was standing at the end of the jetty, with the water above his ancles, holding his wife seated on a railing, whilst Sissie clung to a post a little farther back, and a small crowd of sympathetic observers looked on from a short distance. The three most interested were too dizzy with suspense and dread to see what they so intently watched for, but a hearty shout from the bystanders told them what they longed to know. The instant

the men stopped rowing, Mr. Preston rushed forward, and, up to his waist in water, caught Arnold in his arms, and literally carried him on to the jetty, where his mother fell upon his neck, and broke into an hysterical storm of tears, having most heroically controlled herself until now.

As Edmund landed, Sissie tried to hurry forward, but found that her legs would not support her, and so remained clinging to the prop she had chosen. Edmund came up, and gravely kissed her. In the agitation of the moment, she forgot to wonder at his calm and self-possessed manner. She forgot also that Arnold was a semi-rejected lover, whose hopes must be kept down, and when he came slowly up to her she seized both his hands in hers, and looking in his pale face, murmured, "Oh, Arnold!" as if he were an accepted lover. At the same moment Arnold fell back into his father's arms, and fainted away.

CHAPTER II.

EDMUND recovered from the evil effects of his adventure much sooner than Arnold did; indeed, the only lasting effect on him was quite the reverse of evil—every one being struck by the great improvement which had been produced in his mental condition. He could remember all that had taken place, at least after Arnold had joined him in the sinking boat, and he appeared to have a clear and grave sense of the danger from which he had escaped. This was principally shown by his extreme devotion to Arnold, who was for some time confined to the house, and whom Edmund visited every day. His mind seemed also to have received some

faint impression of the folly and heartlessness of Sophie's conduct in subjecting him to the risk he had run, for he no longer sought her society, and when he did meet her, an air of cool disdain took the place of the fervent admiration which he had formerly evinced for her. To Sophie this change was the source of deep mortification, but she was too conscious of the light in which her share in the Monk's Bay episode might be regarded by others, to venture at present on any attempt to resume her empire over the boy whose life she had so nearly sacrificed; and it was a great relief to her when Mr. Rice, having business in London, settled to take all his family there for a little change of scene.

Another thing which seemed to prove that Edmund's intellects were becoming stronger, was his behaviour to Herbert at this time. Shortly before the Monk's Bay picnic, Herbert had failed in the examina-

tion for Harrow, as he had failed, the previous year, in that for Eton. Sir Percy was much annoyed, and had since treated the boy with a harshness to which his children were little accustomed. Herbert resented this bitterly, and, in his turn, behaved to his father with sullen disrespect. Sissie tried in vain to heal the breach, which every day grew wider. She felt that there was much more excuse for her father than for her brother, as, although Sir Percy was certainly needlessly stern to the boy, there had been great provocation in Herbert's two, apparently, wilful failures, for it was generally agreed that only his indifference to the result had prevented him from passing either examination. Feeling this so strongly, Sissie was surprised and vexed when Edmund decidedly ranged himself on Herbert's side. The two boys had never had much in common, and no one expected that Edmund would show any interest in this matter. There seemed now, however,

to be some secret bond of union between the brothers; and the first proof, since Edmund's illness, of any care for others, was given by the words, uttered suddenly at breakfast one morning, "Papa, may Herbert go to sea?"

Sir Percy, who was always tenderly considerate of Edmund, turned this off, as he would have turned off a similar question from a little child. Edmund, too restless ever to remain long at table, left the room soon after, and then Sir Percy said sternly to Herbert, "I wonder you were not ashamed to set that poor fellow to ask what you had not the face to ask yourself."

"Why shouldn't I have the face to ask?" returned Herbert, sullenly.

"Do you expect me to take any trouble to gratify *your* wishes, when you have proved yourself so utterly indifferent to mine?"

"I should think you'd be glad enough to get rid of me by the way you treat me."

"How do I treat you?" asked Sir Percy, with flashing eyes.

"You're always bullying me about those bothering exams. As if a fellow could be expected to care about passing. Much good it did Edmund! If you hadn't made such a rout about his getting on, he wouldn't have been what he is now."

"How dare you throw that in my face, sir!" exclaimed Sir Percy.

"I dare do what I choose," returned Herbert, furious with his long pent-up sense of injury. "I don't care if you turn me out of the house. Any place would be better than this. There's been no peace or comfort since we left Cover-heath. I am sure I wish Edmund would find the real heir, and let there be an end of it all!"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Sir Percy, starting to his feet, with a face of deadly whiteness.

"I mean that Edmund and I know as well

as you do that you have no right to Monk's Own!" answered Herbert, defiantly.

Sir Percy stepped forward as if he would have struck the reckless boy. But, as Sissie started up in alarm, he checked himself, and merely said, in a tone of forcibly suppressed rage, "That impertinence has settled the matter. If you had asked me properly, I might have exerted myself to fulfil your wishes; but, now, you shall never go to sea."

"Shall I not? We shall see," snarled Herbert, as his father left the room.

"Herbert! How could you speak to papa in that manner? Do you know how exceedingly wrong it is?" asked Sissie.

"I know," said Herbert, carelessly, as he strolled to the window. "Ask the governor if he knows how exceedingly wrong what he does is. Edmund wants me to find out the real heir. I can't do that. But I won't stay here, where we've none of us any right to be. Bother! there's that fellow Preston!

and now Ned will be hanging about him for the rest of the day. I shall go and hunt up Captain Bligh. There's some sense in him."

As Herbert left the room, Arnold entered it. Sissie had not seen him since he fainted on the pier at Cheddle, and she was much moved by the traces of suffering still visible in his hollow eyes and pale cheeks. Her nerves had also been so upset by the recent scene, that she was, perhaps, more open to moving impressions than she would otherwise have been.

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Preston!" she cried, grasping his hand warmly. "But I am miserable to see how ill you must have been!"

"I am well now," returned Arnold, smiling tenderly at her; "quite well now that I have at last got here."

"What can we say to you?" Sissie continued, standing by his side, as he sank

wearily into an arm-chair; "how can we ever thank you for what you did?"

"Don't speak so, Sissie!" he cried, holding up his hand to stop her; "I cannot bear to hear it. It takes all the hope out of my life."

Sissie looked at him in amazement.

"You told me I might try to win you," Arnold continued; "but if you speak so, I shall not dare to try, for fear I should get from gratitude what I want from love."

"Might not the one lead to the other?" asked Sissie, wondering, as she spoke, whether it was ever so.

"Could it?" cried Arnold, eagerly. "Do you think it might? If there is any hope of that, I will not mind being thanked. But I would rather hear you say 'Oh, Arnold!' as you did on Cheddle Pier, almost as if you cared that I was safe."

"I *did* care, Arnold," said Sissie, gravely.

"Only because you would not have liked me to die in saving Edmund."

"Not only that. Not that at all," returned Sissie, frankly, but with a deep blush.

"For my own sake, Sissie? At all for my own sake?"

"For your own sake," replied Sissie, in the same manner as before.

"Sissie, tell me—I said I would not ask for years—but you have given me a hope I did not think to have for years. I must know more now. Do you care at all more for me than you did when I spoke before?"

"Yes."

"Much more?"

"Yes. Much more."

"Oh, Sissie! Tell me quickly! Enough to make you answer me differently now to what you did then?"

"Yes, I think so."

"You think you could care for me now enough to be my wife?"

"When I saw you leap into the sea at

Monk's Bay, I thought I should be very proud to be your wife, Arnold?"

"And since then? Do you think so still?"

"I think you are the noblest man I ever saw."

"But is that all?" asked Arnold, in a tone of disappointment. "You think that because you overvalue what I did for Edmund. But love, Sissie? Could you love me?"

"I honour you deeply, Arnold."

"But love—I want love."

"Then tell me if this is love," returned Sissie, ingenuously. "I miss you when you are away, as I never miss any one else; I care more for your good opinion than for the good opinion of any one else; and I feel that if you were my brother, or my father, I should never have any trouble, but could tell everything to you, and should always be at ease, and happy."

"And if I were your husband, Sissie?"

"I suppose I should feel the same," answered Sissie, with the grave simplicity of a child.

"Süsse! My Süsse! Then you will be my wife!" exclaimed Arnold, starting up and clasping Sissie in his arms. "But Sir Percy; what will he say?" he added, releasing her, and looking inquiringly into her face.

"He will say I am to please myself," answered Sissie.

"And it would please you to be my wife?" Arnold cried, and was about to throw his arms round her again, but was checked by her perfect calmness.

"Yes, I believe it would," Sissie answered, meeting Arnold's fervent gaze with a look of quiet consideration.

"Oh, Sissie, you do not love me!" Arnold exclaimed. "You look so cool and indifferent about what is a matter of life and death to me."

"I am not really indifferent," Sissie answered; "but I do not quite understand my own feelings yet. You must teach me to understand them."

"And shall I speak to your father?"

"Yes, if you like. Do you wish to see him now?"

"May I? Sissie, do you really say that I am to ask him for you?"

"Yes, I suppose it is right that you should, Arnold. I am afraid I am very unsatisfactory, but indeed I think that I like you as much as it is in my nature to like any one."

"Say 'love,' Sissie, not 'like.'"

"Love, then. I think that I love you better than I could ever love any one else."

"Oh, that I could make you love me one thousandth part as I love you!"

"Perhaps I shall in time," said Sissie, quite simply.

"Then now let me see Sir Percy. Where

is he to be found?" asked Arnold, going towards the door.

"I will see," exclaimed Sissie, hastily, remembering the state of mind in which her father left the room.

She found Sir Percy in his study, which was a kind of ante-room to the library. He looked flushed and excited, but spoke very gently to Sissie.

"Papa, Arnold Preston is here, and wishes to see you."

"I will come directly, darling;" and Sir Percy moved towards the door.

"But he wishes to see you alone, papa."

"Oh, oh! What is that for, Sissie?" turning to look sharply in the girl's face.

"He wants to ask if he may marry me."

Sir Percy looked more intently than before.

"Do you like him, Sissie?" he asked, in a doubtful tone.

"Yes, papa."

"You are very cool about it," said Sir Percy, as he put his arm round his daughter's waist, and turned her face more fully towards himself.

"It is all right, papa," was Sissie's somewhat boyish answer to this scrutiny.

"If it is 'all right' with you, Sissie, I am sure it is all right with me. I always liked young Preston, and we have all reason to love him for what he has done for us. Send my future son-in-law to me, then, as soon as ever you can spare him. God bless you, my darling. I trust you will be very happy."

As Sissie returned to Arnold, she wondered what it was in her which made her appear so cool, and feel so little elated at this moment, when most girls would have been all joyful agitation; she felt no agitation, and very little joy—only a sense of safety and repose.

Edmund was in the breakfast-room with

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Arnold, and would have followed his friend when he went to speak to Sir Percy, but Sissie called him back, and as an excuse to detain him, asked if he would mind lending his scrap-book to the little Boyds.

"No; they may have it. But some of the pictures are loose. They must take care they don't fall out. Look here," giving the old book to his sister, and showing her that on several of the leaves there were blank spaces.

"I will gum these down before I send it," Sissie said, absently turning over the leaves as she spoke.

Suddenly, at the back of one of the pictures which had come partly unpasted, and had curled up, her eye was caught by a handwriting strange, and yet familiar. Instinctively she closed the book until Edmund had left the room; then she turned again to the leaf which had attracted her attention, loosened the bit of

paper which was still fixed, and read these words:

"my wife. Perhaps you will say that my father's prejudices can * * * be so strong that he would refuse to acknowledge my marri * * * with one in every way suitable, merely because she is a S* * * man; but I know that his prejudices are the strongest part of * * * the whole of him is iron. I dare not risk my boy's future by a * * * confession of my secret marriage. I know that if anything should * * * wrong with me, Rupert will take care of my son, but if I dis * * * my father, he might put it out of Rue's power to do anyt * * *."

This paper had evidently been torn off the top of a letter. A word or two was wanting at the end of each line. On the other side was a spirited drawing of a pretty cottage.

Sissie had soon recognised the handwriting as similar to that on the scrap of

paper of which Clement had possessed himself, so much to her father's displeasure. Before she had read to the end of the fragment, it had become a certainty to her mind that this was part of the letter from Henry Monk, of which her mother had spoken—the letter which told of his marriage, and of there being a son by that marriage. Then the exhortation to Edmund, which she had regarded as the wandering of her mother's diseased brain, was in fact prompted by a knowledge of the truth. Her father had lost this scrap of paper, and had forgotten the important matter which it contained. Too absorbed in this idea to remember anything about Arnold, and his business with her father, Sissie had reached the door with the intention of recalling to Sir Percy's memory the letter from which the fragment had been torn, when suddenly there fell, like a cold, dead weight upon her heart, a terrible conviction that her father

had not *forgotten* the letter, and the confession which it contained. The scene with Herbert this morning, the previous similar scene with Edmund, the effect of Clement's appropriation of the seal—all these served to put it beyond a doubt that Sir Percy had wilfully concealed his knowledge of there being a nearer heir to Monk's Own than himself.

Sissie never knew how long she had been sitting, stupefied with horror and perplexity, when Arnold re-entered the room. The sight of him recalled to her mind all that had lately passed between him and herself. But with this recollection came another. "You could never deceive me," Arnold had said. She would not deceive him. This terrible secret, which had forced itself upon her, had risen as a wall between them. Could she tell him that her father was—it was too dreadful even to think the word she should have to utter. Could she engage

herself to one who believed her to be the daughter of Monk of Monk's Own, when the possession of Monk's Own was such a deep disgrace?

"Sir Percy has been most kind; I have got from him the sweet I coveted, my own Süsse!" cried Arnold, coming eagerly towards her. "Sissie, what is the matter?" he cried, as he caught sight of her pale, agitated face.

"I—I—" stammered Sissie. "It is of no use. Oh, Arnold, it cannot be!"

"What cannot be?" cried Arnold, turning as white as she was.

"You must despise me! You must think me all that you most hate. You must call me a flirt and a deceiver, but I can never marry you," returned Sissie, passionately.

"Sissie! Sissie! Do you know that you are breaking my heart? You do not surely realise the cruelty of what you say."

"I must be cruel—I must be everything that is bad."

"But what—I cannot understand. What is the meaning of this?"

"I cannot tell you. I hope that you will never know. I would rather you should always think me the mean wretch you think me now."

"Tell me, Sissie, is it anything against me?"

"Nothing—nothing in the world. Oh, that it were!"

"And must I know no more? Am I to be dismissed in this way?"

"Oh, Arnold, be merciful! If you love me, ask me no questions—be contented to think me capricious, and false, and treacherous."

"I will never think that. I told you once that I would sooner doubt everything in the world than I would doubt you, and I will keep my word. However appearances

may be against you, I swear to you, Sissie, that I will always believe you to be the truest woman that ever breathed."

"This is too much," murmured Sissie, pressing her hands tightly together, as she struggled with her rising sobs. "Th—is gen—erosity is mo—re than I can bear."

"It is only justice," returned Arnold, sadly. "It is no fault of yours that you cannot love me. I was a fool to think you could, when you talked of gratitude! Even that semblance of love was such an unexpected boon, that I had not the courage to test it more closely. I am rightly punished. I have been in a fool's paradise for half an hour, and this, I suppose, is a fool's purgatory." He turned away as he spoke, and made a few steps towards the door.

"Say you forgive me, before you go," said Sissie, humbly.

"Forgive you! Sissie, this blow would not so utterly have crushed all the manhood

out of me, if I did not love you too well ever to need to forgive you."

"You are the noblest man that ever lived."

"You think that—and yet you cannot love me."

"I cannot love any one. I shall never marry."

"No one will ever love you as I love you. Many may be more worthy of your love, but none will ever pay so high a price for it. Good-bye:" he held out his hand calmly as he spoke. Sissie took it with vehement emotion, and pressed it between both her own. Arnold turned abruptly away, and left the room. Then Sissie gave free vent to the tears which were choking her.

When the first outburst had exhausted itself, she grew calmer, and began to reflect that, after all, she might have been scared by a shadow which would vanish on a closer view. Determined to prove whether or not

this were so, she went at once to her father. Sir Percy came towards her with a beaming face, as she entered his room. "Well, my darling," he said, "are you as happy as your young lover?"

These words cut Sissie to the heart, but she paid no outward heed to them. Holding the paper towards Sir Percy, she asked, "What is this, papa?" and looked him full in the face as she spoke.

"A scrap out of my waste-paper basket, I should think," returned Sir Percy, with a forced air of unconcern, but turning so ghastly white, that Sissie knew he had recognised the writing, and also knew that it was no mere shadow which had scared her.

"Is it not part of the letter of which mamma used to speak—the letter you had from Henry Monk, telling of his marriage and mentioning his son?" asked Sissie, boldly, though she trembled so that she could scarcely articulate.

"Is this another edition of Herbert's folly and impertinence? I thought you were coming to me on a very different subject, Sissie," said Sir Percy, subsiding from a tone of indignation into one of gentle reproach—he could not speak angrily to Sissie.

"Oh, papa, do let me talk to you of this subject. Do try and clear it up."

"There is nothing to clear up. It is a mere phantom, with which my children are all bent on driving me mad."

"If it is a phantom, it can be dispelled by examination. Dearest papa, do look at this, and try to find the letter from which it was torn. This piece was pasted in little Nellie's old scrap-book. If you could find the rest of the letter, we might get some clue to help us in discovering what has become of the son he mentions."

"There is no son, I tell you, Sissie—no lawful son, at any rate. Harry was

never married; every one is agreed as to that."

"But could you not put this paper into the hands of somebody who understands such things—a lawyer, or a detective——"

"Yes, and put myself up to universal scorn, as being in unlawful possession of——"

"And then, if he could not find any one out, we should all be satisfied, and could be happy again," Sissie continued, not regarding her father's interruption.

"Happy! I shall never be happy again, when my children are all in league against me to prove me an impostor!"

"If you could only prove that it is all right, papa."

"You and your brothers may prove that it is all wrong. Find this heir in whom you take such an interest—for whose sake you would sacrifice your father."

"Do you give me leave to find him?"

"Oh, certainly—pray find what does not exist."

"Papa," said Sissie, solemnly, "I have told Arnold that I cannot marry him."

"Have you told him of your unnatural suspicions?" asked Sir Percy, in extreme agitation.

"No, I could not do that. I have allowed him to think me capricious and deceitful. But how could I engage myself to him when I believe that I am not what he thinks me?"

"And when you believe that your father is an unconvicted felon, eh, Sissie?" asked Sir Percy, in a tone of bitter reproach.

CHAPTER III.

THAT same afternoon, as Sissie was in the park with little Clement, Mr. Preston walked up the avenue. Seeing Sissie, he crossed the grass and came to meet her.

"Would you object to sending your little brother away?" he asked, in a low voice, as they shook hands.

"Clement, run and see if papa is in the house—don't disturb him if he is busy. I dare say Mr. Preston will excuse him."

"I have nothing to say to Sir Percy; it is you I want to speak to," returned Mr. Preston. "Something has gone wrong between you and our boy, Miss Monk," he continued, as soon as Clement had left them. "What is it?—if I may make bold to ask."

"Your son asked me to marry him; but —Mr. Preston, I like and honour him more than I can say—but I cannot marry him."

"Hum! That's queer. The boy's not bad-looking, and he can talk like the House of Parliament. It isn't like what I thought of you, Miss Monk; but there's no reckoning on other people—we are all cast so different. Can it be, my dear," coming confidentially nearer, and looking earnestly in Sissie's face, "can it be that you don't fancy me for a father-in-law? Because you know ——"

"Mr. Preston! How could you think that? I should be proud to have you for a father-in-law."

"Well, that's handsomely spoken, my dear; and I am sure I should be proud of you for a daughter-in-law. But when Arnold came home so broken down—looking for all the world like a ghost—and told us that he must go away from Kirklands, to try and get the better of a great blow he had got,

we knew—his mother and me—what the blow was; but we couldn't scarcely believe that you didn't fancy him. So, thinks I to myself, 'John Preston, it's as likely as not you are at the bottom of this—don't you let *your* great carcass stand in the boy's light. There's a many young ladies wouldn't care to call *you* father-in-law!' So I just took the liberty, my dear, of coming over to see if I couldn't make things a little square. Has it ever struck you that my boy don't much favour his father?"

Sissie stared for a moment—thinking that Arnold's expressions of feeling towards his father had always been particularly favourable.

"Well, you don't often see such a rough-cut one as me with a son who is as good a gentleman as any in the land?" pursued Mr. Preston.

"Oh, no; I understand now. No, I don't think you and your son *are* alike,"

answered Sissie, wondering to what all this would lead.

"Well"— in a hoarse whisper—"he is not my son!"

"Not your son!"

"No. It's the will of the Almighty, so I mustn't say ought against it; but it does seem hard sometimes. My dear, it isn't in human nature for any father to love his son better than I love that boy."

"I am sure he loves you as well as if he were your son," remarked Sissie, consolingly, as her companion stopped to wipe his eyes and blow his nose.

"You haven't a notion what a good heart he has," continued Mr. Preston, laying his hand emphatically on Sissie's arm as he spoke. "When I first knew him he was a slip of a bright-eyed lad no bigger than your brother Clement—and not unlike him either. He was a spirity little chap; and when I began to court his mother he didn't like it a

bit. I fancy I can see him now—drawing himself up so proud—when I wanted to make friends with him. But the poor soul wasn't left with much to bring up a boy upon—especially a sharp lad that would do credit to the best teaching he could have; so, as I knew it would be better for him in the end—though he didn't see it then—I took no heed of his little bits of tantrums, and we were married. Well, I took the boy away from Bedford School—that was where I first saw my dear wife. I went there to look up the son of my old master, who had been getting down in the world as fast as I'd been getting up; and, quite by chance like, I saw my missus and her little boy in church. I always tell her it was the boy, not her, I lost my heart to. Well, as I was saying, I sent him to a clergyman, who only took a few—all sons of swells; and as soon as he was old enough he went to Rugby School. I should have liked dearly

to have had him called by my name; but no, my little master wouldn't have it at no price; nor yet he wouldn't call me father. I thought perhaps he was in the right of it; it seemed kind of cruel to rob his dead father of him. Well, at Rugby he made friends with plenty of swells, and he used to go home with them in the holidays; and it was as good as a play to see the fine airs the little chap could give himself. He seemed to think I wasn't fit to wipe the dust off his shoes. We had many a good laugh about it—my Mary and me. Well, one summer—the boy was nigh upon sixteen then—we were staying in Coventry for a few days; and there was a grand out-door party given by the father of one of Arnold's school-friends. The boy came over from Rugby with his friend and a lot of other chaps, and we went with *our* friends. There was a big picture-gallery to be seen, and I had heard say it was something extra

fine; so, when my missus was getting thick with all the fine folk, and I thought they would not make such count of her if they saw she belonged to me, I went and had a look at the pictures. There was a little fellow there that seemed to know all about it. I thought he was a guide, like there is at St. Paul's, in London; so I set to work to get what I could out of him; for, though I'm not clever myself, I can manage to pick up a good deal from them that are. Well, I was sucking this little fellow's brains, and he was going through all the history, just like one of those guides, when I heard a laugh behind, and there were five or six lads about Arnold's age, and Arnold at the back of them. I didn't mean to speak to my boy, because I thought perhaps he mightn't like it before all these fine friends of his. He didn't see me at first, and one of the lads began talking to me—poking fun at me, I soon saw; trotting me out, you know,

to show the others what a great booby I was. And in the midst of it up comes Arnold, holding out his hand to me. And says he, 'Here you are, father! How do you do?' He never called me father before, you know. And with that he turns round to the little fellow I'd been pumping, and says he, 'Lord ——· (I forget the name; but that's neither here nor there), this is my father, Mr. Preston.' Then the lord shakes hands with me, and says he's proud to know me, and all that, and my young masters look silly for having quizzed me; and for all the rest of the day there was that noble boy stuck to me like a leech; and after that it was always 'father,' and we saw no more of his little grand airs; and nothing would serve him but he must take the name of Preston."

"Did he never know his own father?" asked Sissie, much interested in the narrative.

"Not to remember. He died when Arnold was about five. A poor good-for-nothing chap, I fancy; but my Mary set great store by him, as was natural, and he was a gentleman, as the boy is, though he was only an artist, and as poor as a church-mouse. I often wish, for Mary's sake, I was a gentleman too; but wishing won't polish me, or teach me what I didn't learn when I was a youngster. At any rate, it is a comfort to think that if my time was spent in making money instead of making myself a gentleman, a gentleman will have the spending of the money I have made."

There was silence for some minutes, and then Mr. Preston asked, "And you really don't fancy my poor boy?"

"You know it is impossible always to like best those who deserve it most, Mr. Preston."

"I know that, my dear. Then really

that is it? You can't love the boy, though he loves you with all his heart?"

"I am very sorry"

"So am I. But it cannot be helped. And he is off to London to-morrow; and Heaven knows when we shall see him again."

"And that is my fault?"

"What you can't do, you can't. You can't love Arnold; and Arnold can't help loving you. That's the way of the world. I am sure the first time I saw my Mary, I thought to myself, 'I will marry that woman, or no one;' but I was very down-hearted about my chance of getting her. I never fancied any other woman in all my life; and my life wouldn't have been worth much to me if she couldn't have fancied me. I am afraid it is that way with poor Arnold. He is not the lad to change when once he's set his heart on anything; but it can't be helped. Good-bye, my dear. God

bless you! You won't mention what I have told you—about Arnold's not being my own son; he doesn't wish it known."

Sissie had promised to spend the next day with the Rupert Monks. She would have excused herself, but she had to arrange with Miss Colquhoun, who had been staying at the Rectory for some weeks, about her return to Monk's Own, and she was afraid that any change in her plans would arouse the suspicions of her penetrating friend.

As she rode over the downs with Clement she saw Arnold advancing in a direction which would oblige him to cross their path. Where the roads met he stopped for an instant, and seemed inclined to come forward and speak, then suddenly changing his mind, raised his hat, and walked rapidly on. In a few seconds, however, he overtook Sissie's horse, which was slowly cantering, and laid his hand gently upon her rein.

"I am going away," he said, looking in her face with a wistful, lingering gaze. "Good-bye, Sissie."

"Good-bye, Arnold," answered Sissie, mournfully, as she placed her hand in his.

He held her hand without speaking, his eyes still fixed upon her face—such hollow, sad-looking eyes, that they made Sissie's heart ache. Suddenly he dropped her hand, with a fervent, "God bless you, Sissie!" and turning abruptly away, strode rapidly across the moor.

Rather to Sissie's relief, the family at the Rectory were not in much better spirits than herself.

"You will find us a sad grumpy set, Sissie," said Mrs. Rupert, who was alone with Miss Colquhoun in the drawing-room when Sissie arrived. "Wilfred is the most woe-begone object I ever saw; and Walter is not much better, though he has his

parish-work to occupy him; and, besides, he bears his troubles more like a woman. Laura is, I fancy, aggrieved that Stephen Rice has gone away and has 'made no sign.' Lucy is sighing over Arnold Preston's bad looks and her certainty that this sudden visit to London is in order to consult a doctor. Do you know anything about it?"

Sissie tried to look perfectly unconcerned as she answered, "I saw him yesterday, and he called himself quite well. I just met him on the way here, and he told me he was going, but did not say a word about his health."

"Then Lucy may be reassured. I only hope she will not fidget about his health, and pity his interesting looks till she fancies herself in love with him. Then Lottie, also, has a sentimental grievance. She says that Edmund is no longer her friend—that he never speaks to her now,

and is always occupied with Arnold Preston or with Herbert."

"I am afraid I am very unfeeling about poor Lottie's grief; it is such a good sign that Edmund is beginning to prefer the society of men and boys. Don't you think it is, Aunt Harriet?"

"Yes, certainly. But Edmund has been a different creature since that Monk's Bay affair."

"Do you think the danger awakened his dormant faculties?" asked Mrs. Rupert.

"I am more inclined to think that the improvement is due to the increase in Arnold Preston's influence over him, and to the sudden cure of his absurd infatuation about Sophie Rice," returned Miss Colquhoun.

"I am not sure that the infatuation itself—absurd as it was—did not do him some good," remarked Sissie.

"It is well that Sophie should be the

means of doing some good, for she has done mischief enough," said Mrs. Rupert.

"Are Uncle Wilfred and Uncle Walter both so miserable about her?" asked Sissie.

"Yes, poor boys. I am quite afraid for Wilfred."

"But I thought he had the best chance with her of any one. There seemed such a good understanding between them the day of the picnic."

"What a game the little flirt played that day! Yes, certainly, I thought Wilfred was the favourite then; but since that all her attentions have been bestowed upon Edmund—I suppose because she saw that she was in danger of losing him. She treated Wilfred so coolly once or twice before they left, that he vowed he would never speak to her again; but now he has made up his mind to follow them to London, and make a formal proposal. She seems

always somehow to have evaded that catastrophe."

"Do you think she cares at all for Wilfred?" asked Miss Colquhoun.

"I don't think she cares for any of them. The strangest thing is, that the day before they left, when Sophie was making a last desperate attack on Edmund, Mrs. Rice said to Wilfred, 'Is it not good of my dear Sophie to take so much notice of that poor boy? We should almost fancy his handsome face had captivated her, did we not know too well where her affections are fixed.' Wilfred took this to himself; indeed, he says it was said with such a pointed look that he could not do otherwise; but Walter tells me that a few days before Cara assured him that he would have a much better chance than his brother, if he were not so retiring and so easily disheartened as he is. What they are all scheming for I cannot conceive."

"I fancy that I can," said Miss Colquhoun. "I believe that all the heart Sophie has—a microscopic allowance—is fixed upon Wilfred, but her ambition will not allow her to think seriously of him for a husband. So, as Arnold Preston seems quite beyond her reach, she is willing to console herself with the future prospect of some day being Lady Monk."

"Oh, Aunt Harriet! That is impossible. She cannot seriously think of marrying poor dear Edmund!"

"Poor Edmund's present weakness would place all the more power in the hands of his wife, and power is, undoubtedly, the one thing, besides herself, that Sophie really loves."

"And how do you account for her behaviour to Walter?" asked Mrs. Rupert.

"I believe that she cannot resist the temptation of attracting as many lovers as possible. Besides, there is always the

chance of losing one or two, and it is well to have a goodly reserve."

"Well, Harriet," said Mrs. Rupert, laughing, "you seem to know all about the tactics of a coquette. We shall be inclined to suspect that you have practised the manœuvres which you seem so thoroughly to understand."

"I never had the opportunity," returned Miss Colquhoun, "for I was never sufficiently attractive to gain a single lover, much less half-a-dozen."

"It is a wicked thing for any girl to treat men so!" exclaimed Mrs. Rupert, indignantly. "If Wilfred is thrown over, he will never be the same man again. I am afraid we shall never see him again—at any rate, not for many years. Now that there is a talk of war, he will have no difficulty in getting a ship, and he will leave England a broken-hearted man, without the wish ever to return."

This prediction was verified sooner than any one expected, and the accuracy of Miss Colquhoun's observation was proved at the same time. The day after Sissie's visit to the Rectory, Captain Bligh went to London. A week later he appeared at Monk's Own, very pale and grave, with a hard set expression in his mouth and eyes.

"I have come to say 'good-bye,'" he said. "I sail to-morrow."

"So soon!" exclaimed Sissie, who was alone in the library.

"The sooner the better. It is certain that we shall have a war, and that is the best thing that could happen to me." He sank into a gloomy silence, which Sissie was afraid to break. Suddenly rousing himself, he said, "I have neither time nor spirits for long leave-taking, Sissie. I have just been home to pack up, and say 'good-bye' there, and now I am on my way to the train. My father is going to Portsmouth with me

—he naturally feels that this will be a final parting. If your father is in, I should like to shake hands with him. He is my oldest friend, and we shall, probably, never meet again."

"Oh! I am so sorry! Papa has gone over to Kirklands."

A still darker shade crossed Captain Bligh's face. "You will have to pay congratulatory visits to Kirklands before long," he said, with a bitter laugh, which ended in something like a groan. As he spoke he caught Sissie's hand, wrung it fiercely, and almost ran out of the room. Dr. Bligh and Walter were at the door in the Rectory chaise, which soon went jogging down the avenue, carrying three sad faces, and hearts as sad, Sissie thought, as she stood watching at the window.

The next morning, Sir Percy having to drive over to Monk's Kirk very early on some magisterial business, Sissie accom-

panied him as far as the Rectory. She found Mrs. Rupert tearful and very indignant, Miss Colquhoun looking stern, but rather triumphant.

"Harriet was right, Sissie," said Mrs. Rupert; "the little minx is making a desperate attack upon Arnold Preston, and poor Wilfred was sent to the right-about."

"Did he actually propose?"

"Yes. He saw what was going on at once. The Rices took him with them to a party, and Arnold was there. Sophie seems to have tried hard to keep Wilfred on as far as she could without risking her chances with Arnold."

"From what you have told me, her chances in that quarter do not seem very great," put in Miss Colquhoun.

"No. That appears to have cut poor Wilfred to the heart more than all the rest. He says that young Preston seemed utterly indifferent to the attention lavished upon

him—to take it more as a right than anything else."

"And Uncle Wilfred proposed after that?"

"Yes. He was determined to know his fate, one way or another; so, the next morning, he spoke to Mr. Rice. That old fox expressed great surprise, great regret that Wilfred should so have mistaken his daughter's innocent gaiety of nature, and finished by saying that he hoped soon to call for the congratulations of all his friends on an engagement which would give him the most entire satisfaction; not that he should not consider it a great honour to be connected with the Bligh family, etc.—but it was impossible that Wilfred should not have seen that Sophie's affections were no longer free. Wilfred was so indignant at the double-dealing to which he saw he was a victim, that he demanded an interview with Mrs. Rice, and asked her to explain the hint

she had given him as to Sophie's affections. She laughed at the mention of an engagement with Arnold, intimated that she hoped her daughter would never condescend to the son of a Mr. Preston, and maintained that Sophie preferred Wilfred to all her other admirers. There was nothing for it, then, but to appeal to Sophie herself. But nothing satisfactory could be made of her. She agreed with her mother in denying the probability of an engagement to Arnold; but she would say nothing which Wilfred could take as positive encouragement to himself. Perplexed and worried, Wilfred was leaving the house, when Mrs. Rice most warmly invited him to a dance, which they were going to have in the hotel where they are staying, the following evening. He could not resist the opportunity of again seeing Sophie and Arnold together, and he went. At the beginning of the evening, before Arnold came—for he was very late—Wilfred

was standing near Sophie, when she suddenly turned towards him, and held up a feather of some rare foreign bird, which he remembered to have given her the day before he went to sea the last time, when she was a child of sixteen. As she did this she said, 'This is the most precious thing I have, for I *do* love you, Wilfred.' Of course the poor fellow was in the seventh heaven directly, and was going to act upon the confession, when the little impostor told him on no account to betray her, as her father would be furious if he knew that she encouraged any one but Arnold. When Arnold arrived, she showed herself a most dutiful daughter, for she encouraged him so openly that every one spoke of them as an engaged couple. Arnold was not nearly so cold as before, but seemed quite willing to play the part which had been assigned to him."

"What part?" asked Sissie.

"The part of acknowledged lover. Late

in the evening, Wilfred came upon the couple sitting, in very lover-like fashion, in a vestibule. Her back was turned, so that she could not see the intruder; but Wilfred says he cannot imagine how Arnold Preston could have failed to recognise him, as he actually looked in his face whilst saying, in continuation of something which had been said before, 'I should never venture to raise my hopes so far, after the many proofs I have seen of your strong feeling towards Captain Bligh.' Sophie laughed—a laugh which Wilfred says he never shall forget—and answered, 'Poor Wilfred! He is so devoted that it would be cruel quite to break his heart.' 'Surely it is more cruel to give him false hopes?' Arnold said. 'Perhaps I have been to blame in sometimes using him as a means to rouse some sort of feeling—if it were only anger—in one that I know.' And though Wilfred could not see her face, he knew that she looked at Arnold as she

had often looked at *him*, making his blood boil with her soft, loving eyes. Arnold coloured deeply, but seemed otherwise unmoved. He went on, 'Then you have never loved him?' 'Never, Arnold; how could it be possible?' she answered. 'And you have told him this?' 'He knows that I have no heart to give him.' Poor Wilfred says that even then it made him savage to see the look, almost of disdain, which crossed Arnold's face, as he asked, 'Do you mean that you never had a heart, or that you have mislaid it?' '*You* at least ought to know that I am not heartless, Arnold,' said Sophie; and another of the looks went up into Arnold's sneering face. 'It is only Captain Bligh, then, for whom you have no heart?' 'For many others: there is only one for whom I have a heart—*you* must know who that one is.' At this moment Wilfred could contain himself no longer, and stepped forward. 'Will you oblige me, Miss Rice,' he

said, 'by again showing me the feather you so kindly value?'"

"Well done, Uncle Wilfred!" cried Sissie.

"Sophie looked as if a ghost had addressed her," Mrs. Monk continued. "She drew the feather out of her waistband with trembling fingers, without looking at either of the men. Wilfred says that Arnold looked more amused than shocked, as a man in his position ought to have been. 'And you say this is the most precious thing you have?' Wilfred said, taking the feather from her. 'May I ask you to state why it is so precious to you? or perhaps it may suffice if you state how you became possessed of it?' The little hypocrite actually had the face to answer, 'I am sure I don't know; I have quite forgotten. Oh, I believe I intended to ask if you would kindly take it to Laura, as I think she would like to have it in her museum. It is a very rare specimen.'

Wilfred answered her, 'As your memory seems to have strangely failed within the last hour or two, I will tell you how you got it—or, at least, how you told *me* that you got it. I gave it to you in the garden at the Hermitage, four years ago last August, and just two hours ago you showed it to me, saying, This is the most precious thing I have, for I *do* love you, Wilfred. Those were your exact words. You begged me not to betray you; but I consider that what I have since heard releases me from any obligation to obey your wishes. I hope that what I have now said may not come too late to release Mr. Preston from any obligation which he may have contracted towards one who is as false as she is heartless.' With that settler to Miss Sophie, Wilfred walked away."

"And Arnold?" asked Sissie.

"He said, quite coolly, 'Shall we dance this Redowa, Miss Rice?' and led her

into the dancing-room just as Wilfred descended the stairs."

"Lucy says," observed Miss Colquhoun, "and I quite believe she is right, that Arnold Preston was only acting a part, in order to open Wilfred's eyes to Sophie's true character. It seems that he once told Lucy that he should like to do something of the sort. She says that he always expressed the greatest abhorrence of Sophie."

"He certainly did that," said Sissie, thoughtfully.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS COLQUHOUN returned with Sissie and her father to Monk's Own that afternoon, exchanging the dulness of the Rectory for painful excitement at the Tower. Sissie had not been surprised at Herbert's non-appearance at the breakfast-table, as Sir Percy's engagement had obliged him to start for Monk's Kirk before the usual breakfast hour; but when on their return they found that nothing had been seen of the boy that day, and that his bed had not been slept in the previous night, both she and her father became seriously alarmed. Sir Percy's distress was the more poignant that he blamed himself for having driven his son to

some rash step by his recent harshness towards him. Sissie, remembering Herbert's expressions on the day of his outbreak against his father, had little doubt that he had run away with the intention of going to sea. Miss Colquhoun gave force and direction to the vague suspicions of the others by the information, that before Captain Bligh went to London Herbert had haunted him like his shadow, and that Wilfred had said that the boy was constantly importuning him to take him with him whenever he should get a ship. Herbert was evidently very unwilling to admit the idea that a preparatory education was necessary before he could be taken into a man-of-war.

Sir Percy had no sooner received this clue than he started in pursuit of the runaway. His confidence of being on the right track was a little damped at the railway station—to which Miss Colquhoun and Sissie accompanied him—by the assertion of both the

officials, that Herbert had not gone by any train from thence. They perfectly remembered Captain Bligh leaving by the 5.50 up-train the preceding afternoon, but Herbert, whom they knew as well as they knew the Captain, had not been in the station since he came with Sir Percy by the 6.10 down, about three weeks ago. Miss Colquhoun's ready wit was again of service in suggesting that, to elude pursuit, Herbert might have chosen to meet the train at a station where he was unknown; and, with renewed hope, Sir Percy continued his journey, whilst Sissie and her friend returned to wait and watch at Monk's Own.

In two days there came a letter from Sir Percy, to say that Captain Bligh's ship, the Ariadne, had sailed, with a favourable wind, two hours before he reached Portsmouth. He had engaged a small steam-vessel to try and overtake the Ariadne, which had sailed outside the Isle of Wight; but, after passing

the Needles, they had encountered such a gale that the captain of the steamer was glad to run her into Weymouth, from whence Sir Percy wrote. He intended to return to Portsmouth the next day, in order to make further inquiries, with a view to ascertaining whether or not Herbert had sailed in the Ariadne.

These inquiries resulted in nothing more satisfactory than the discovery of a young woman, who declared that, as she and her husband, who was ship's carpenter on board the Ariadne, were putting off to her, about an hour before she sailed, a young gentleman answering the description of Herbert had begged for a passage in their boat, and when they reached the ship had clambered up the companion-ladder—nimbly enough, but not like a sailor—and had disappeared before she and her good man got on deck.

Sir Percy returned to Monk's Own, worn out and dispirited with his week's fruitless

search. At home, however, the intelligence awaited him for which he had sought in vain elsewhere. Sissie met him at the door, with a letter in her hand from Captain Bligh. Wilfred wrote:—

"Ariadne, off Plymouth.
May 15th, 1854.

"DEAR PERCY,

"Off Portsmouth, and almost at the moment of sailing, your boy Herbert came on board without my knowledge. I first discovered him, prostrate with sea-sickness, about two hours ago. As it is impossible for me to keep him, I shall send him ashore with the pilot, who now leaves us. I hope the stiffish gale we have had may have cured him of his fancy for a seafaring life, and that he will reach you as soon as this does.

"Yours ever,

"W. A. BLIGH."

Herbert's dogged temper was too well

known in his family for them to have much hope that he would come home as readily as Captain Bligh supposed. Indeed, Sir Percy was so convinced that nothing short of compulsion would bring the boy home at all, that he only allowed himself a few hours' rest, and started at daybreak for Plymouth, having first arranged that Sissie and Clement should go to London with Miss Colquhoun in the course of a day or two, leaving Edmund at the Rectory. Sissie would have liked to defer this visit to London, which had been so longed talked of, but Sir Percy would not hear of giving it up, and insisted upon the necessity of having the best medical advice for Clement, who was growing extremely fast, and was very far from strong.

It was now nearly four years since Sissie had first come to Monk's Own, and she was almost as reluctant to quit the place, even for a few weeks, as she had then been to come to it. Anxious about Edmund, whom,

for the first time since his illness, she was leaving to the care of others; terribly uneasy about Herbert, of whose recapture she had little hope; and, above all, weighed down by the secret suspicion, which it seemed equally wrong to harbour or to dismiss Sissie began her journey to London in no very cheerful mood. Self-analysis had never been one of her tendencies—happily for her, every girl was not then taught to lay bare and explain the workings of her own heart and mind with all the familiarity and confidence with which a watchmaker treats the mechanism of an eight-day clock. Still, as she looked silently out of her window, Miss Colquhoun and Clement occupying the other side of the railway carriage, Sissie could not help wondering at the change in herself during the last four years—or rather, as she would have known, had she examined herself a little more curiously, during the last nine months, ever since the day when Edmund

had communicated to her his doubt of their father. The change she felt was that her self-reliance, formerly the most striking trait in her character, had given place to a weary, hopeless longing for some stronger mind to lean on—the longing which had made her say to Arnold, that to have a claim on him would make her always feel at ease and happy. In her own home she had ever been the one to lead, and she had felt it only natural that it should be so; the others had deferred to her judgment as a matter of course; and, in the old times, no occasion had ever arisen when that judgment had been at fault, when she had for one moment doubted what it was best to do. Now, however, such an occasion had arisen, her judgment was powerless to decide between filial duty and the laws of honour and integrity. The very novelty of any such doubt between two courses intensified the pain of it, and the desire to cast the responsibility

on some other mind. In Arnold she had recognised, almost from the first, the straightforward decision of character which alone could grapple with such a case as this; and again and again, when harassed by her doubts, her mind would turn with a sense of relief to Arnold's strongly expressed preference of honesty to every other virtue; and it would seem to her as if he exhorted her, with Beppo's faithful eyes, to follow the dictates of her sense of honour, at whatever sacrifice to her feelings of affection.

Thus meditating, and, in her absorption, quite forgetful of time and place, Sissie was not a little startled to meet the very eyes of which she was thinking. At first she fancied that her imagination had conjured up the face which had been in her mind, but a moment's reflection, aided by the cry of "Rugby! Rugby!" sufficed to convince her that it was no creation of her fancy, but Arnold himself, who stood on a platform a

short distance from that at which their train was stopping. As their eyes met, he started, coloured, and bowed; then, after a moment's hesitation, crossed the line, regardless of warnings to the contrary, and, opening the carriage door, took his place in the vacant seat opposite to Sissie.

"I could not help it," he said, in a deprecatory tone, as the train moved off; "seeing you here was too strong a temptation." After reaching across the carriage, to shake hands with Miss Colquhoun and Clement, he continued: "I am extremely anxious to know about Herbert. My father writes me sad news; and I was just wishing I could learn more of what must, I fear, be a great trouble to you."

Sissie told him all there was to tell. "I am afraid papa's journey to Plymouth will be fruitless," she said, in conclusion.

"You think he will have got off in some other vessel?"

"I am afraid so. He is very resolute, and he had set his heart on going to sea. I wish he could have gone with Wilfred Bligh!"

"And so poor Captain Bligh has gone! It is as I always feared—that little demon has done her demon's work!"

Sissie looked up in surprise at this remarkably strong language; and Miss Colquhoun, catching the tones of Arnold's indignantly raised voice, inquired, "Of whom are you speaking in such highly complimentary terms, Mr. Preston?"

"Of Miss Sophie Rice," returned Arnold. "I believe all here are agreed as to her merits."

"We were told a short time ago that *you* had shown such an especial appreciation of her merits, that we should have to offer our congratulations at Kirklands and at the Hermitage," observed Miss Colquhoun.

Arnold gave a quick, eager glance at Sissie's face. "Poor Bligh told you that, I

suppose," he said quietly. "With the object, in which I succeeded, of opening his eyes, I played rather a dangerous game, and one which would have been utterly unwarrantable with any one but the most selfish and heartless coquette that ever existed. No," he continued, with excited earnestness, "if what you were told had been true of me, not your congratulations would be called for, but condolences more deep than if I were sentenced to be hanged."

"Are the Rices still in London?" asked Sissie.

"I believe so. I got sick of London, and went to Rugby the day after Bligh left. I have been visiting several friends there, and now I am going up to Oxford."

"But you are not on the road to Oxford," remarked Miss Colquhoun.

"No, not now," returned Arnold, with a conscious laugh. "I *was* on my road there, but now I shall take London in my way.

It is all the same to me, provided I reach Oxford to-night."

"Were you educated at Rugby?" asked Miss Colquhoun.

"I learnt one thing there," returned Arnold.

"Only one thing!" exclaimed Sissie, making an effort to arouse herself from the strangely passive mood into which she felt inclined to sink.

"Only one thing thoroughly. My father has, as you may have observed, such a craze for education, so-called, that he insisted upon having me taught everything that a private tutor, as well as the regular masters, could undertake to teach. The consequence was that I got a smattering of many things, and a firm grasp of nothing but the one thing which, under the influence of such a head-master as Dr. Arnold, it was simply impossible to miss."

"And that was?" asked Sissie, anticipa-

ting with a kind of dread the answer which she felt would come.

"To love honesty above everything in the world."

"A wider rendering of the copybook maxim, 'Honesty is the best policy,'" observed Miss Colquhoun.

"That vile maxim!" exclaimed Arnold; "it is an insult to honesty to mention it in the same breath with policy. True honesty is not an act but a state, and how can the state of a man's character be affected by his policy? An honest policy is undoubtedly the best, but if it is not the natural fruit of an honest heart, it will soon fall to the ground. I have spoken," he concluded, colouring at his own prolixity.

"You have spoken much to the point, Mr. Preston," said Miss Colquhoun, "and I quite agree with you. If you learned nothing else, your schooling was not wasted."

"My father need not have sent me to school to learn that, for no one could teach it better than he does himself. Have you ever heard my father's history, Miss Monk?"

"No; not his early history."

"His father was an itinerant cutler, a degree above a knife-grinder, in that he sold as well as ground. His mother died when he was a baby, and his childhood was passed in trotting along by the side of his father's movable grindstone all over the suburbs of London. When he was about eight years of age, an accident with a blade he was sharpening gave the father inflammation in one of his eyes, which brought on erysipelas, and killed him. The child was left utterly without friends or money. He remembered, however, having once received some kind notice from a cutler at Sheffield, with whom his father had dealt, and, without an idea beyond the name of the place and the man, he started in search of this possible

friend, begging his way as he went. The cutler was dead, but after great privations he at last got some employment in a factory. He must have had a most astonishing power of living upon nothing, for, even here, he contrived to save. One day, in the street, he saw a big boy bullying a little one, and of course interfered to support the weaker side. In the scuffle my father was pushed against the plate-glass window of a shop, and the window was broken. It was dusk at the time, and just as the boys were startled by the crash the little one took the opportunity of escaping, pursued by the big bully, more infuriated than ever. My father went to the rescue again, and, for the time, forgot the window; but his conscience was not easy about it, and the next morning he took all his little hoard of pence and sixpences, and offered to pay for the damage. The shopman was so pleased with the boy's honesty, that he took him into his employ-

ment, and was his firm friend ever afterwards, leaving him a rather considerable legacy when he died, some years later. Before this my father had got employment in an iron-foundry, and had saved enough to take a few railway shares, which turned out a most profitable investment. By what he calls his singular good fortune, but others consider his singular good judgment, he continued to invest in various schemes, with invariable success, until he had laid by enough money to buy some ironworks at Dorlington. These have risen in his hands from a small to an immense concern, and unless any unexpected reverse——"

At this moment another passenger entered the carriage, and took his seat between Sissie and Miss Colquhoun. Sissie did not observe his face at first, but when, after a few minutes, Arnold offered him the *Times*, she was startled by the familiar tones of the voice which acknowledged the

attention, tones which seemed almost to bring back to her even the very scent of Cover-heath.

"How do you do, Mr. Warren?" she said, turning cordially to her quondam lover, her eyes sparkling with the happy recollections which his voice had conjured up.

Mr. Warren was overjoyed at the unexpected meeting, and expressed his joy in no measured terms. Sissie had many questions to ask about her dear old home, and all belonging to it, and Mr. Warren was glad enough to answer as fully as she could desire. Arnold looked on, with a very black face indeed, and a rapidly increasing wish to throw the new comer out of window. Euston Square was reached, however, without any such catastrophe, and here Mr. Warren took his leave, having previously asked permission to pay his respects to Sir Percy in Berkeley Square.

The carriage which had been ordered to be in attendance was nowhere to be seen, and, after some discussion, it was found out that the order had been given to meet a wrong train, which was not due for twenty minutes. There was nothing for it but to remain patiently in the waiting-room, where Miss Colquhoun placed herself by the fire, which, in spite of the lateness of the season, was still very welcome.

"Do not stay for us, Mr. Preston," said Sissie. "It is getting so late, you will never reach Oxford to-night."

"I cannot go till I have seen you into the carriage," replied Arnold. Then, drawing nearer to Sissie, and speaking in a strangely toneless voice, he said, "I have no right to ask, I know—nothing but my deep interest in knowing can at all excuse it—but, Sissie, do you mind telling me if that man is anything to you?"

"Nothing but an old friend," said Sissie,

looking frankly into his agitated face. "Nothing but that, I assure you."

"One thing more," said Arnold. "I could not ask any question when you spoke as you did that wretched day, but now—I have thought since that, perhaps, I need not yet give up all hope—perhaps you will still let me try to make you love me. Sissie, say that I may have as good a chance as any other man."

"You have that, Arnold," said Sissie, mournfully. "But," she added, hastily, as she saw the delighted glow on Arnold's face, "you must not think anything of that. I shall never marry."

"And you will not tell me why?"

"I cannot. Do not ask. The greatest kindness you can do me will be never to speak to me in this way again."

"Then I must not see you, Sissie. I have not the strength to see you, and not to speak of that with which my heart is bursting."

"I wish we could be friends only," said Sissie.

"That shows how little you understand my love. It is impossible for us to be friends if we can be nothing more."

"Very well. Then we cannot be friends. If you were my friend, Arnold, I should like to ask you one thing."

"You are torturing me, Sissie. But you know I am, and always shall be your friend. Ask me what you like."

"Suppose you knew of a great wrong, which you could set right, but only by injuring one whom you loved, and to whom you owed everything, what would you do?"

"Should I be conniving at the wrong by not setting it right?"

"Yes."

"Then it seems to me that it *must* be set right, at any cost."

"Thank you," said Sissie, faintly.

The carriage being announced at that

moment, and Arnold having to escort Miss Colquhoun to it, nothing more passed between him and Sissie, excepting the "good-night" which they exchanged at parting.

CHAPTER V.

Sissie was now quite decided that the only course open to her was to find the son of Henry Monk—if he were to be found. She felt convinced that her father would never confess how much he really knew—unhappily, there could be no doubt that he knew more than he chose to say—unless the heir, whose existence he had concealed, were actually produced. How to do this without betraying her father—how to convict him so thoroughly that he must be driven to confess, and yet not to convict him before the world of any tardiness in confessing, was a problem which seemed quite insoluble. But one thing was clear. She had constituted

Arnold her oracle, and the oracle had pronounced that the wrong must be set right at any cost. Incontestably the first step towards setting the wrong right must be to discover the person wronged. As a preliminary to this, Sissie had to find out all she could about Henry Monk.

At Monk's Own there were very few relics of this unfavoured son, and he seemed to have been deficient in attaching qualities; for, whilst every one in the neighbourhood, rich and poor alike, had a good word, or even a regretful tear for Rupert, and a hundred anecdotes were told of his boyhood and youth, no one had anything to say of Henry, excepting that he was a strange fellow, and, some thought, not quite right in his mind. All were agreed that his terror of his father amounted almost to a monomania. There was only one person who was ever spoken of as having been intimate with him, and this was Mr. Rice,

to whom Sissie had so strong an aversion that she could not bring herself to question him on the subject.

An unpleasant consciousness with regard to this member of the Monk family had made Sissie hitherto avoid all reference to him in her intercourse with Miss Colquhoun, but now she was driven to apply to Miss Colquhoun as the only person who could give any information which might be of use to her in her search. The day after their arrival in Berkeley Square—Miss Colquhoun being established in the house as *chaperone* to its young mistress—Sissie cautiously began her inquiries. Miss Colquhoun had been expressing her satisfaction at being once more in her dear London, and Sissie had expressed her surprise at any one preferring London to the country. "And you must feel so thoroughly at home at Monk's Kirk. I should have thought you would like that better than any place," she said.

"I was very fond of Kirklands when I was a girl," Miss Colquhoun replied; "but the stagnation of the country wearies me now. I suppose in youth we are so full of life that we do not need the outward excitements which we cannot dispense with as we grow older. There was sufficient outward excitement, too, at Kirklands when I was a girl. The house was always full of guests."

"Did you see much of Cousin Rupert, Aunt Harriet, and his brother?" asked Sissie, with a trembling voice.

"Poor Rupert! At one time he could not keep away from our house. That was a sad business!"

"What was, Aunt Harriet?"

"You have heard of my half-sister, I dare say. Rupert wanted to marry her, but his father was so infuriated at the idea that he was forced to give it up."

"Why did Sir John object?"

"Julia had been educated in France, and

Sir John had taken it into his head that she had acquired French tastes, and was not fit for an Englishman's wife; 'the French mam'selle,' as he called her.

"*Was* she French in her tastes?"

"Not particularly so. She was very handsome, and extremely proud. It was well known in the neighbourhood that she was to have Kirklands, which had been her mother's property, and she was literally besieged with suitors. I believe your father was the only man that ever came to the house who did not make love to her, and Rupert was the only one who made love to her for herself, not for Kirklands."

"Did she like him, Aunt Harriet?" asked Sissie, interested in the story, in spite of its not at present appearing likely to lead in the direction she wished.

"I think she did—in a cool kind of way. But she would enter into no engagement without Sir John's consent; and Sir John

positively refused his consent. Rupert was sent abroad; and then his father took a strange fancy. He sent for Henry, who had been wandering about on the Continent, no one knew where, for many months, and insisted upon his trying to supplant his brother."

"When was that?" put in Sissie, hastily. "How long ago?"

"Let me see. It must have been in the year 1832; more than twenty years ago."

"And did Henry Monk do as his father wished?"

"Yes. He paid great attention to Julia; but I never thought his heart was in the least touched."

"And how did it end?" asked Sissie, breathlessly interested now.

"As badly as it could end. Henry had brought a friend down with him—a man who was slightly known to us all—the son of the solicitor to the Monk family. I soon

found out that, whilst Henry Monk was making open advances to Julia, his friend was making secret love to her. I could not imagine that there could be any danger to her from the attentions of a person so thoroughly unlike a gentleman as Alfred Hughes was, but I was surprised that she should permit any approach to familiarity from such a person, and I told her so. She resented my interference with so much violence that I began to fear some more active interference was called for. Shortly afterwards Henry Monk proposed, and Julia decidedly refused him. He and his friend both left Monk's Own immediately."

"And your sister?" asked Sissie.

"She became more reserved and haughty than ever; but I could see that she had some secret sorrow. In about six months Mr. Hughes returned to Monk's Kirk. My poor father was very ill at that time, and I was so much occupied with him that

I could attend to little else. He died; and the very day after he was buried Julia ran away with Alfred Hughes."

"Is she dead?" asked Sissie, in a low voice.

"No, I believe not. All intercourse between us has ceased long ago. He was flying from his creditors when she went off with him. Kirklands was soon sold, but that did not go far, and they had to leave England a few months after their marriage. I believe that they are now living in New York."

"Did you ever know how Henry Monk bore his disappointment?"

"I had always an impression that it was more of a relief than a disappointment."

"And Rupert? How did he bear your sister's marriage?"

"He came home looking very wretched, I have been told, for I had left Kirklands then; but he was not long in consoling

himself with Maria Bligh, whom his father had always held up to him as the model wife for an English country gentleman."

"Dear Mrs. Rupert! I don't wonder Sir John was fond of her. Did Cousin Rupert ever know about his brother's attempt to supplant him?"

"Yes; and it caused such an estrangement between them that they never met again. Rupert blamed himself for this after his brother's sudden death, which took place about two years after his own marriage."

Miss Colquhoun could give no more information about Henry Monk, whom she had never seen since his rejection by her sister. On Sissie asking a few questions — as seemingly careless as she could make them —about his personal appearance, Miss Colquhoun described him as a tall, thin, wiry man, with jet black hair, a sallow complexion, and wild black eyes, which, as much as anything in his conduct, served to

give the impression that he was out of his mind."

"And was he at all mad?" asked Sissie.

"He was eccentric, certainly, but no more mad than most clever men are who dare to be original. The Monks, you know, have often been originals in their way, but they have never been famous for any large share of intellect. Poor Henry got his cleverness with his Irish blood, and Sir John was as disgusted with the one as with the other. He used to say that the 'Irish brat,' as he called Henry, was a Monk neither in mind nor body."

That evening Sir Percy came home, having, after diligent inquiries, become convinced that Herbert had sailed in a merchantman, bound for China, the same day that he was landed from the Ariadne. There was nothing more to be done, but to hope that the boy would before long send his family some news of himself.

After dinner Miss Colquhoun said, "I have been telling Sissie that sad story about poor Julia. Did you know that man?"

"What, Hughes? To be sure I did."

"Not well, did you?"

"Very well, at one time. We were not the best of friends, though. In fact, I believe Hughes hated me with all his heart. He was in love with my poor Nellie, you know."

"No. You don't say so. When was that?"

"At the time she became engaged to me —a few months before he married your sister. I always thought that was out of pique; with, of course, a side view to Kirklands."

"Had he known Miss Herbert long?" asked Miss Colquhoun.

"About a year, I think. I came from Canada in 1830, and we were quartered at Portsmouth that summer. My poor Nellie

was walking with Hughes the first time I saw her—at a review. He went abroad that winter—with Harry Monk, I think." Sir Percy caught Sissie's eye as he said this, and coloured deeply. "He could not have come to Portsmouth again till a year later —after Christmas—for I remember Nellie and I were engaged then—secretly, however, for I wanted to get Sir John's approval before the thing was talked of. We used to laugh together at Hughes when he was making love to Nellie. I remember he was unusually flush of money just then, and used to give Nellie magnificent presents, which made me very savage."

"You married about that time," remarked Miss Colquhoun.

"The next summer. Captain Herbert was very kind, and Sir John was quite inexorable, so I thought there was no use in waiting. The very day our engagement was made public Hughes went off, and the

next I heard of him was that he was married to your sister—about a month before we were married."

"Then the man was actually in love at the time that he was playing that double game with poor Julia!" exclaimed Miss Colquhoun. "It was on New Year's Day that Julia refused Henry Monk, and he and his friend left Monk's Own."

This conversation was of great service to Sissie, as it helped to fix on her mind the date of Henry Monk's proposal to Julia Colquhoun, which necessarily determined the date of his marriage. This, Sissie now knew, could not have taken place before the beginning of 1832. Her inquiries, therefore, need only be directed to the years between 1832 and 1837, when Henry Monk died. If she could find out where he was living during those five years, her task would be much easier. It now seemed probable that he had been abroad for nearly

a year before his attempt to win the heiress of Kirklands. It did not appear that he had gone abroad again after that. He was certainly in England when he wrote the letter to his cousin, of which the fragment in Sissie's possession contained the only clue she had to follow. This was the stationer's stamp on the corner of the paper—"Rooke, Amesbury," Sissie read it. She gathered, also, from the mutilated scrap of writing, that Henry Monk's wife was a Scotchwoman of birth and position equal to his own, and that he had lived with her in the pretty cottage sketched on the face of the paper. The only plan she could think of by which she could pursue her object, without exciting suspicion, was to go herself—by herself—to Amesbury, and there to search for a cottage resembling the drawing, and for a stationer of the name of Rooke. Whilst she remained under Miss Colquhoun's charge such a proceeding was not to be thought of, and

all active attempts to set the wrong right had therefore to be deferred until Sir Percy's return to Monk's Own in July should free his daughter from her friend's observation, and from the laborious gaiety of her first London season.

The night before they were to move northwards, Sissie appeared in her father's dressing-room as he was preparing for bed.

"Papa," she said, with a trembling yet determined voice, "you told me that I might try and find out what I could about Henry Monk's son. I shall never have any peace of mind till I have done all that I can do."

"I was in hopes you had forgotten that nonsense, Sissie," said Sir Percy, mournfully.

"I shall never forget it till it is settled one way or another, papa. I mean to go to-morrow to Amesbury, in Wiltshire."

Sissie waited to see the effect of this on her father. Sir Percy looked surprised,

but merely remarked, "You cannot go alone."

"I must. If I were to take any one with me, I could not keep the matter secret."

"You have still so much consideration for me, then, that you desire to keep your suspicion of me a secret."

"Oh, papa! If you would but help me!"

Sir Percy was silent. His face was very pale, and his mouth twitched nervously. After a moment, he rose, and walked rapidly across the room. Then, coming back to his seat, he said, sternly, "Sissie, say no more to me of this folly. I only forbid your travelling alone. You must take Clement, if you can take no one else; and I cannot let Clement go without Phœbe."

"Very well," said Sissie, after a short pause of consideration; "I will take them both, if you like. Phœbe can safely be trusted with a secret. I shall start from

here with you, papa, and then Aunt Harriet will think I have gone home with you, and at home they will think I am staying with her."

"Very well. Have you any more intentions to apprise me of?" asked Sir Percy, coldly.

"No, papa."

"Then good-night. Mind, Sissie, I do not forbid your going on this fool's errand, but I warn you that it will be as vain as it is ill-judged."

"I must ease my conscience, if I spend my whole life in a fruitless search."

"I have no more to say, then. Good-night."

All Sissie's self-reliance returned to her as soon as she began to act. When she had started, with Clement and the old nurse, for Amesbury, she felt the most entire confidence in her own ability—as far as courage went—to carry through the task she had set

herself. The Cover-heath days had given her a readiness for independent action, and had early taken from her the girlish bashfulness which shrinks from unsupported intercourse with strangers. She had not a moment's feeling of timidity in being alone with her little brother at an inn, so far away from all her friends. She and Clement had quite a merry evening, and the next morning she began her work with a brave heart.

No stationer of the name of Rooke was to be found in Amesbury, and no one could remember that such a name had been known there as lately as 1837. Nor was the name of Monk on the books of any of the tradespeople to whom Sissie applied during the first two days of her search. On the third day, however, she entered a small miscellaneous shop, with a medley of fancy articles, stationery, and sweets displayed in the window. There the usual question

produced the unusual answer: "Monk, let me see. Here, Emma, my dear! This lady wants to know if we ever had the name of Monk on our books. The name seems somehow familiar to me."

"And so it do to me," replied the brisk little wife, bustling in from the back-parlour, and immediately applying herself to the ledger. "Yes, sure, here it be," she cried, handing the book to Sissie, after a tolerably long examination.

Sissie glanced through the pages indicated to her, and observed that the items entered were surely the purchases of a very youthful customer—twine, marbles, and bulls-eyes being the articles most frequently occurring.

"Law, James, to be sure," said the good woman; "it was one of Mr. Petchild's young gentlemen. I remember all about it now. Mr. Petchild came here hisself, and made a pretty to-do about your having given the

young gent *such long* credit. A nice spoken young gentleman he was, too."

"About what age?" asked Sissie.

"Well, miss, may be about the same age as young master here."

"And when was it he had these things?"

"Let me see. Here's 1843–44–45. It leaves off in 45, miss. That must have been when he left Mr. Petchild. But you'll learn all you want to know there, miss."

Thus encouraged, Sissie lost no time in visiting Mr. Petchild—a severe-looking, but not unkindly man, who undertook to educate small boys at a very small annual charge. Mr. Petchild had no very vivid recollection of Master Monk, but an assistant in the establishment, who took charge of the boys' linen, and superintended their health and their ablutions, perfectly remembered the little boy, and recalled to the master's mind the fact of his having put a summary end to his school career by running away. Mr.

Petchild did not seem much pleased by this last reminiscence, and the indiscreet Miss Mitchell hastened to add that Master Monk was a spoiled child, and was, therefore, less amenable than others to school discipline. That he was a spoilt child was only the natural result of his mother being a widow. On hearing this, Sissie began to think that her search seemed likely to be concluded with unlooked-for ease. It was, however, some time before she could gain any information as to where Master Monk had run to, until, at last, Miss Mitchell remembered that he had been a great favourite of one of the servants, who had since married and settled at Salisbury.

Back to Salisbury Sissie went, and paid a visit to Mrs. Weston, formerly Ann Swain. There she had little difficulty in learning what she wanted to know. Master Monk had written to his dear Ann very frequently after leaving school, and she had preserved

his letters. These letters were produced—ill-written, ill-spelt, childish scrawls—dated from St. Andrew's, Scotland. This seemed to bring Sissie still nearer to her goal, for what more natural than that the Scotch wife should have returned to her own country after her husband's death? From the post-marks it appeared that the letters were written in 1846, and Mrs. Weston said that Master Monk was about eleven years of age when he left Amesbury, but looked less, being very small and fair.

The dates tallied so exactly with what Sissie had learnt about Henry Monk, that she felt it to be clearly her right course to follow up this track, on which she had so quickly lighted. She therefore started the next morning for St. Andrew's.

It seemed as if Sissie's course were to be one of unbroken smoothness. At St. Andrew's the first person she asked knew all about Mrs. Monk, and at once pointed

out her house—a very pretty villa, which once might have been a very pretty cottage, and in its original structure, to which great additions had been made, bore a considerable resemblance to Henry Monk's sketch. In the drawing-room Sissie was welcomed, with the cordiality of an old friend, by a stout, fair woman of about forty, who, when younger and slighter, must have been remarkably pretty. "I hope you will not think my visit an impertinence, Mrs. Monk," Sissie began.

"My dear young lady! not in the least!" cried the good-natured woman, seizing both Sissie's hands, and shaking them heartily. "I am delighted to see you in my humble abode, and your brother, too, bless his little heart!"

"My name is Monk," Sissie began again.

"Shake hands with me once more, Miss Monk, my dear young lady. It is a name we may both be proud of!"

"I am very anxious—for family reasons —to find out a young man of the name of Monk."

"Not my Jack! My dear good creature! You will have to seek far before you find a better young man than my Jack, dear boy, bless his heart!"

"I was advised to come to you by a person of the name of Weston; she was formerly boy's maid at Mr. Petchild's, at Amesbury."

"Ah, friend Petchild! An excellent, worthy man, my dear; but hard, very hard! He didn't understand my Jack. Couldn't appreciate the dear boy's fine sensibilities! But Ann Swain, dear, good soul! I'll never forget all my boy owes to that noble-hearted creature!"

"From what she told me, I fancied that perhaps your son might be the young man of whom I am in search."

"You shall see him this instant, and

judge for yourself, my dear Miss Monk. Here, Jack, dear boy, come here! Here's a lady wants to see you, my dear child."

This summons was answered by a fresh-faced, good-humoured-looking boy of about eighteen, whose appearance produced two impressions on Sissie's mind—first, that his health did not appear to have been materially injured by the bull's-eyes, and secondly, that he was as little like the Monk family as it was possible to be. However, he was so like his mother, that he could hardly be like his father also.

"This good young creature has seen your dear Ann, my child," said the mother.

"No, have you really?" cried the boy. "And how is the good old soul? And how's old Petchild? As great a skinflint as ever, I suppose."

"My dear child! Now, don't. He is so full of his fun, Miss Monk. I am sure he wouldn't say one word against dear,

good, worthy Petchild. Now, would you, Jack?"

"Not *one* word, mother dear. I'd say about a thousand words against the old miser. But, perhaps, he's a friend of yours," turning to Sissie.

"No, I have only seen him once. I went to him to try and find *you* out."

"Me! What ever did you want of me?"

"My dear boy! Now, don't! You are so funny, Jack!"

"Well, I don't know whether I do want anything of you or not," said Sissie, much puzzled how to get any information about Jack's father without hurting the widow's feelings. Jack himself, however, helped her out of her difficulty.

"My mother calls you Miss Monk," he said. "Are you one of my grand relations?"

"Silly child! How you do talk!" exclaimed the mother, who laughed at every word her son said.

"Where do your grand relations live?" asked Sissie.

"Oh, I don't know. Somewhere in England, don't they, mother? Not anywhere near Amesbury, though."

"Now I come to look at you both, I think there is a very remarkable likeness between you and my Jack," remarked the widow.

"Your son is remarkably like you, I think," said Sissie, hoping this might lead to some mention of the father.

"Dear boy! Bless his heart! Do you think he is? But he's very like his father, too, sometimes." As she spoke, she looked up at a full-length portrait of a little, dapper, rosy-cheeked man. Sissie had noticed this picture, and noticed the boy's likeness to it, but she had imagined it to be probably the portrait of his maternal grandfather, or uncle. Now, however, she asked, "Is that the portrait of any relation?"

"That's his poor father—my dear, good

Thomas," answered the widow, wiping her eyes.

"Then this is not your husband's hand-writing?" asked Sissie, too eager to stand any longer on ceremony.

"No, indeed, it isn't. My dear, good husband wrote as pretty a hand as any lady."

Sissie's hopes of having discovered the object of her search crumbled away at once, and she had all her work to begin over again. Mrs. Monk insisted on the travellers staying at her house until they had had two good nights' rest, and she parted from them with tears and embraces.

Sissie returned to Amesbury to renew her inquiries in that neighbourhood, but these inquires were all in vain. She hunted out all the Monks in Wiltshire, Hampshire, and Dorsetshire, but amongst them all she did not find any one who gave her such hopes of success as she had felt when she first met with the Scotch widow's "dear Jack."

CHAPTER VI.

SISSIE did not reach Monk's Own till the end of August. Whatever might have been thought of her long and mysterious absence, no one made any remark upon it, excepting Lucy, and Sissie silenced her by saying gravely that the business which had kept her away from home was, and must remain, a secret. Sir Percy asked no questions as to the result of her search, and Sissie did not dare to speak to him on the subject. He was even more than usually tender in his manner towards his daughter, and evidently felt, as he expressed himself, very glad to have her back again.

"I have made an attempt, during your

absence, to get a substitute for you," said Sir Percy, with a smile, when he and his daughter were alone together, on the evening of Sissie's return. "But my attempt failed."

"Whom did you try to get, papa?" inquired Sissie.

"I asked Harriet Colquhoun to marry me," replied Sir Percy, colouring.

"And what did she say?"

"She told me I was an old fool. Not in so many words, but what she wrote amounted to that."

"I had no idea you thought in that way about Aunt Harriet, papa," remarked Sissie, timidly.

"If, by 'that way,' you mean a romantic attachment, I do not think in that way, Sissie. But I know she would make a good wife, and a sensible stepmother for you. She does not seem to think, however, that you need a stepmother. My idea was, that

you were over-taxed by the care of your brothers, especially Edmund."

"How do you think Edmund is, papa?" asked Sissie, finding it rather difficult to continue the conversation about Sir Percy's matrimonial attempt.

"He writes as if he were very well," answered Sir Percy. "His writing at all is a great step. I fancy this trip to the Lakes with Arnold Preston will do him a world of good."

"How kind it was of Arnold!" remarked Sissie.

"Yes. I was especially glad to accept his offer, as Maria seemed to think so seriously of Sophie Rice's influence over Edmund."

"Then you think Sophie has regained her influence? Edmund appeared almost to dislike her after her conduct that day at Monk's Bay."

"Maria told me a long story about the

desperate attack Sophie made on poor Edmund as soon as the Rices returned from London. There was no one else for her to amuse herself with, Maria says, for it seems Walter is quite disgusted. I did not know the young lady had so many strings to her bow."

"I can hardly believe she is such a flirt as Mrs. Rupert thinks."

"Maria is very wrath with her—something about Wilfred, I think; however, it was plain enough, when I came back here, that she was making a fool of my poor boy, and I hardly knew how to put a stop to it. I fancy Maria must have given Preston a hint, for she was always begging me to send Edmund away somewhere."

The next morning Sissie heard more on this subject from Lucy, who was full of Sophie's iniquities. From the day of her return to the Hermitage she had, according to Lucy, never missed an opportunity of

attracting Edmund by the most barefaced flatteries and the most unwomanly advances. Edmund had soon become as much her slave as before the eventful picnic; and Lucy intimated that he would certainly have been inveigled into a regular engagement, had not Arnold's proposal of a tour in the Lake district rescued him from his perilous position.

"What could have induced Arnold Preston to make such a proposal?" asked Sissie.

"He was very much disgusted about Sophie's behaviour, and he said Edmund's only safety lay in flight."

"It was hard that he should again have been the only one to rescue Edmund. I am afraid such a charge will spoil his holiday."

"I think he likes it, because Edmund is your brother," returned Lucy, speaking very slowly and distinctly, and looking Sissie earnestly in the face.

The indignation of the Monk family

against Sophie was increased tenfold a few days later, when it was known that she, with her brother and sister, had also started on a tour in Westmoreland and Cumberland.

"The forward little flirt!" exclaimed Mrs. Rupert. "She has gone in pursuit of that poor boy."

Mrs. Rupert was wrong, however, as to the object of Sophie's pursuit.

In about three weeks Edmund arrived suddenly at home, unaccompanied by any one except the servant who always attended him. He would give no explanation of what had caused his unexpected return, beyond the words, "No one wanted me." He continued gloomy and taciturn, but Sissie was much struck with the increase of intelligence in his countenance and conversation since she parted from him in the spring.

A few days after Edmund's return, Lucy arrived at the Tower, in a state of the most painful excitement. Happily, Sissie was

alone, and she was able to unburden herself at once.

"Oh, Sissie! what *do* you think? They are engaged to be married!"

"Who are engaged?" asked Sissie.

"That nasty, wicked, hateful little flirt, and—and—Arnold Preston."

"Sophie Rice! Nonsense, Lucy! It is quite impossible."

"It is quite true—it must be true. Mr. Rice came to tell grandpapa this morning."

"I can't believe it; I won't believe it!" exclaimed Sissie, vehemently. "Why, Arnold has a positive dislike to Sophie."

"That horrid Mr. Rice told grandpapa that he had long seen how it would end; but he had done all he could to discourage it—because—because—he didn't think it quite a suitable match for Sophie—Arnold not fit for *her!*—but now, he said, as the young people were so deeply attached, he could not any longer oppose it."

"It can't be true, Lucy. Arnold attached to Sophie! It is utterly incredible."

"She can make any one care for her if she pleases. No one can help it. It is just like the wicked charms that one reads about. I wish she could be burnt!" cried Lucy, with childish rage.

"Arnold Preston and Sophie Rice!" repeated Sissie. "Nonsense, Lucy, it is quite impossible! It must be a mistake!"

"It is no mistake," said Lucy, with the tears filling her eyes as she spoke. "I should not mind if it had been you, Sissie," she added; "I should have been glad for his sake, and for yours, too; but that"——not being able to think of any epithet sufficiently bad to apply to Sophie, poor Lucy burst into tears, and buried her face in her hands.

Both to Lucy, and to herself, Sissie positively refused to believe in the truth of this intelligence; but no one else doubted it, when, in a few days, all mouths—excepting

those at the Rectory and the Tower—were full of the engagement which was so pleasantly to unite Kirklands and the Hermitage. No grand talk of higher views for his daughter could cover Mr. Rice's intense gratification, but Mrs. Rice preserved a dignified silence, which procured her the credit of the "higher views" to which her husband laid claim. Mr. and Mrs. Preston could not deny the engagement, though it was easy to see that it was no subject for congratulation to either of them.

The Saturday after the news had spread the travellers came home, and the next day the Rices' pew in church presented the spectacle of Arnold exhibited in due form as Sophie's engaged lover. Sissie could doubt the fact no longer. Her disbelief gave place to disappointment and pity—disappointment that Arnold, whom she had thought so strong, should be so weak; pity for the bitter, hopeless misery shown in his face.

Sissie thought of his words, so soon to be verified, that in such a position as this condolences would be called for more deep than if he were going to be hanged. A man going to be hanged could hardly have looked more utterly broken down with grief than he did now. In her sorrowful concern for Arnold, Sissie had no thought to spare on herself, or she might have rejoiced that her liking for him had never risen to the love he had so coveted. That it was very far from having so risen, she was soon to prove by conduct which some people might have thought proved nothing so much as her deficient sense of propriety.

The Rector never allowed his intercourse with his parishioners to be affected by any personal feelings; so, though one son had been sent away with a broken heart, and the other remained at home with a soured temper, and his daughter told him every day that the Rices were a set of worldly,

minded schemers, he warmly pressed the whole family to come in to luncheon at the Rectory. They had been loitering in the churchyard, with the evident intention of showing off the new conquest, who certainly had all the appearance of a prisoner of war worsted in a hard-fought battle. At luncheon Sophie was a charming example of modest happiness—striving to soften the severity of the Rectory party with soft sighs of penitence, and to thaw the icy manner of her betrothed with words and glances of arch affection. In neither attempt was her success particularly striking. Walter and Edmund kept away altogether. Mrs. Rupert was coldly distant, Lucy defiantly scornful. Laura tried to make herself agreeable, though she knew that for every polite word she should get into trouble with her sister. The Rector and Sir Percy did their best to be cordial, but the Rector over-acted his part, and Sir Percy's laboured civility

betrayed an under-current of contempt which was plainly visible to all the party, excepting Mr. Rice and his son. Sissie alone was natural. For Arnold's sake she wished to be friendly towards his new connections, however much she might doubt his wisdom in having formed such a connection with people towards whom he appeared so little friendly himself.

Sir Percy took his daughter away directly luncheon was over, to pay a visit to a superannuated gardener, who lived on the moor to the right of Kirklands. After half an hour's chat with the old people, Sir Percy walked over a wide stretch of moorland country to Monk's Own, leaving Monk's Kirk far to the right. Sissie, who wished to attend the afternoon service, set off to return by herself to the village. She had only left the cottage about ten minutes when she was overtaken by a violent shower of rain. Perfectly hardy, and accustomed to

be out in all weathers, Sissie cared nothing for small discomforts, and was running along with almost a child's pleasure in a good wetting, when, just where the steep lane leading from the moor joined the high road to Monk's Kirk, she came upon a very dismal-looking party. Cara and Sophie Rice were picking their way along between the already numerous puddles and little streams of water, which were destruction to their dainty, town-made boots. Huddled closely together, they vainly endeavoured to shelter their delicate silk skirts and gay velvet bonnets under a small umbrella which was held over them by Arnold Preston, on whose arm Sophie was leaning.

Sissie, laughing gaily at their sorry plight, joined the party, and with her usual unconsciousness, fell into line with them on Arnold's side, which was that nearest to the lane down which she had come. As she did so, Arnold turned for a moment, and

looked in her face. Oh, those eyes! Poor Beppo's eyes, as he had lain bleeding and dying at her feet! Sissie's gaiety was quite gone. She had not a word to say. How could she talk about the rain and the mud, whilst the pleading agony of those eyes still haunted her?—eyes which so plainly told her that, though bound to another, Arnold still loved her, more deeply now, perhaps, than ever.

Presently wheels were heard coming quickly along the road, and Mr. Boyd's voice cried out, "Can I give any lady a lift?" The gig stopped, Mr. and Mrs. Boyd sitting in front, with the back seat, calculated to hold one, unoccupied. Arnold looked inquiringly at Sissie. "Oh, no, I shall not hurt!" she cried. "I am often wet through."

"And being wet through now, I am not going to let you sit still and get rheumatic fever, even for the sake of my own pocket," said Mr. Boyd.

"*You* are not so thoroughly wet," remarked Mrs. Boyd to the Rices.

"Will you get in, or shall I, Cara?" asked Sophie, with a glance at the stream of water which was threatening to make a very disfiguring mark on her dove-coloured silk gown.

"You had better," returned Cara, understanding the look.

"You might both manage to sit," remarked Mr. Boyd. "We have a capital umbrella to put over you."

The girls both looked wistfully at the chaise, and ruefully at their suffering garments.

"Up with you," cried Mr. Boyd; and in another minute the well-filled gig was disappearing rapidly along the road.

The two left behind walked on in perfect silence, Arnold holding the umbrella carefully over Sissie, though it was impossible for her to be more wet than she was already; and if it had been possible, he certainly chose

the best means to ensure it, by holding a dripping umbrella in a hand which trembled so violently that every moment a shower of drops was scattered all around. Sissie could not make conversation; she felt as if it would be a heartless mockery to ignore the misery of that white, rigid face, and talk on commonplace matters. A sudden impulse seized her. Remember, Sissie was by no means a well brought up young lady, and she *had* no sense of propriety.

"May I congratulate you?" she asked, in a low, pitying tone.

"Do I look as if you might?" returned Arnold, between his set teeth, which literally chattered as he spoke.

"No. That is what frightens me. You look unhappy. Arnold, what does it all mean?"

"It means simply this: that in all the wide world there is no wretch so utterly, hopelessly miserable as I am now."

"That is terrible," faltered Sissie, after a pause. "Can nothing be done. Is there anything that I could do?"

"You, Sissie!" said Arnold. He had been striding along so fast that Sissie could hardly keep up with him, and had never looked at her whilst he spoke, but now he stood still, and gazed into her face, with much the expression with which a sufferer, weary of pain yet hopeless of relief, looks at one who suggests to him some infallible remedy.

"I would do anything in the world to help and comfort you," said Sissie, her eyes filling with tears, through her intense earnestness.

"It is too late," said Arnold, dashing the umbrella down into the mud as she spoke. "Even you cannot help me now, Sissie."

"It is not too late, Arnold!" cried Sissie, "I know it is wrong to break an engage-

ment, but it would be much more wrong to fulfil it with—with—looking and speaking as you do!"

"I have been a fool, and I must bear the penalty of folly. I must marry a woman I detest!"

"But no folly could be so great as that!" Sissie thought a moment—she was recalling what she had heard of Alfred Hughes and Julia Colquhoun; then she said, speaking very slowly, and not raising her eyes from the ground, "Arnold, you asked me to marry you five months ago. Suppose I had changed my mind since then, should you still wish it?"

"Wish it! Does a dying man wish for life? does a prisoner wish for liberty? Sissie! Sissie! This is more than I can bear!" Arnold covered his face with his two hands, and sobbed aloud.

Sissie was greatly moved; she thought of nothing now but how to comfort him. "I

have changed my mind, Arnold," she said, laying her hand timidly upon his arm. "I will marry you, if you wish it."

"Do you love me?" cried Arnold, turning suddenly upon her, his dark sunken eyes flashing like two fires in the midst of his pale face.

"No," replied Sissie, steadily, but very tenderly; "I do not love you as you mean. But I love you a thousand times better than you love Sophie Rice."

Arnold groaned. "God bless you, Sissie, for your sympathy," he said; "but it is of no use; I cannot accept your sacrifice. I am bound; I have given my word, and I cannot break it."

"Tell me one thing, Arnold," said Sophie. "Am I at all to blame for what you have done?"

Arnold looked at her in surprise. "*You* to blame!" he said. "No, how could you be to blame? Ah, I see!" he cried, suddenly.

"No, no, it is not that; I have been a fool, but not such a fool as that. No, Sissie, on my honour, no thought of you, no unavailing regrets for the happiness I could not win, have driven me to this. No, the thought of you would have saved me from it, if I could have been saved. It was all a terrible, hideous mistake. I was fool enough to play with edge tools, and hope to escape unharmed. They have given me a mortal wound, Sissie," he added, with a faint smile, as he picked up Miss Rice's ill-used umbrella, and prepared to walk on.

"You will try and be happy, Arnold, will you not?" asked Sissie timidly, when they had proceeded in silence till Monk's Kirk was in sight.

"I will do what I can to make my wife happy," said Arnold. "But for the other thing, that cannot be."

"How can she be happy, if you are not?" asked Sissie.

"She will be mistress of Kirklands," replied Arnold, with intense bitterness.

Sissie was inexpressibly shocked. "Arnold!" she cried, desperately, "how dare you think of marrying a woman of whom you can say that?"

"I would not say it to any one but you. No one else shall know that I neither love nor respect my future wife."

"I cannot understand it," said Sissie, with a sigh.

"You had *your* secret in the spring, Sissie," said Arnold, with another of the sickly smiles which were more sad than tears; "now I have mine."

The church bells were going as they walked through the village. "You must not go to church in these wet clothes," said Arnold. "I trust you will not take cold."

"No fear of me, I shall go and get dry things at the Rectory," returned Sissie, with an effort to speak cheerfully. "Are you

coming in?" she asked, as they reached the Rectory gate.

Arnold shook his head. "Thank you for your noble wish to sacrifice yourself for me, my darling," he muttered, with suppressed passion, as he clasped Sissie's hand, and then hurried away.

"Sissie, did you ever know anything so disgraceful?" cried Lucy, as she followed her friend into her mother's room. "Stephen Rice has been boasting to Laura that he forced Arnold to propose to Sophie."

"How can that be?" said Sissie. "Arnold would never be forced into anything, and especially not by Stephen Rice."

"He might think he was bound in honour if Stephen told him that Sophie cared for him. Stephen would be quite capable of that. You know Arnold *did* flirt with Sophie before Uncle Wilfred went away, and they might have persuaded him he had made her care for him."

It was a remarkable proof of the strong family feeling which existed amongst the Blighs, that the two brothers had never grown out of their childish habit of telling everything to the elder sister, who had been both mother and sister to them for as long as they could remember, their mother having died when Walter was born. It was through this habit that Sissie soon got further light on the subject of the mysterious engagement.

One morning, about a fortnight after Sissie's wet walk with Arnold, the Rectory pony-chaise drove up the Monk's Own avenue, and a message was brought to Sissie that Mrs. Rupert was waiting to take her for a drive, if she were so inclined. Sissie was so inclined, and, as soon as they started, Mrs. Rupert said, "I have come for you in this way, Sissie, because I want some quiet talk with you, which it is difficult to get at home. You mustn't be angry at what I am

going to say. I don't want to pry into your secrets, but I suppose it is no secret to any one in Monk's Kirk that Arnold Preston has cared for you ever since he first came here. Now, I want you to save him from this preposterous engagement."

"It is of no use, Cousin Maria. I have tried," returned Sissie, sadly. "But I assure you it has nothing to do with me; Arnold told me so."

"You mean that he did not engage himself to Sophie out of pique because he could not get you. I know that. If that had been the case, I would not have stirred a finger to save him. He might have borne the punishment, which he would have richly deserved. But he does *not* deserve his fate, poor fellow."

"Do you know how it all happened, then?" asked Sissie.

"Yes. I had the whole story in strict confidence from Walter; but, as we do not approve of the confessional here, I never con-

sider myself bound to respect anybody's confidence, if I can do more good by betraying it."

"How does Uncle Walter know anything about it?" asked Sissie.

"I am going to tell you, if you will have a little patience, child. Come up, Bishop!" —to the pony—"You know Caroline Rice always favoured Walter more than any other of Sophie's lovers? Well, I fancy they must have had a quarrel when Sophie began to snub poor Wal, or, at least, to take so much less notice of him than of the others. Cara always seemed to be trying to make up to him for her sister's conduct, and she and Sophie have appeared much less friendly lately than they used to be. Since they have been back this time, Cara has been quite tender in her manner to Walter, and, the other day, she began telling him how badly she thought of her sister's conduct to him, and also to Wilfred. At last she hinted that Sophie was not following her own

choice in her present engagement. Walter could not help expressing his surprise at this, and, I suppose, he was rude enough to remark that Arnold did not appear to be following *his* own choice, for Cara then told him that her brother had thought it right to call Arnold to account for having paid great attention to Sophie when they were in London, and again in Westmoreland, *thereby interfering with more brilliant prospects which she would otherwise have had.*" Mrs. Rupert laid great stress on these words, looking significantly in Sissie's face as she spoke. "Arnold seems to have got very angry, and to have said a good many insulting things of the whole family. However, when Stephen appealed to his honour, he professed himself quite ready to propose to Sophie, as he was convinced that her encouragement of his attentions had no more serious meaning than the attentions themselves had had. In spite of that—even Cara, you see, allows that

he made it quite plain that he only proposed to vindicate his own honour, and to prove Sophie's indifference to him,—in spite of that, the girl actually accepted him. Cara implies that her father and brother obliged her to do so. Now, ought this to be allowed to go on? Ought we to suffer Arnold to be trapped in this shameful way? I cannot help thinking that it was all done on Edmund's account. You know he took the poor boy with him to the Lakes to get him out of Sophie's way; and I feel certain that when she pursued them there, he put himself forward to save Edmund from her wiles. You remember how he acted about Wilfred. It was a dangerous game to play, but he hardly deserves such severe punishment."

"Now I understand something he said about edge tools!" exclaimed Sissie, almost involuntarily. "But what could have induced Cara to let out the family secrets in this manner?"

"She says she is utterly ashamed of it all. She reads contempt and dislike in all our faces, and she cannot bear any longer to be mixed up in what meets with such well-merited reprobation. I think the truth of the matter is, that in advocating Walter's cause with her sister, she has talked herself into caring for him herself."

"But, in that case, she would surely wish to hide the family disgrace."

"She was obliged to give some explanation of this engagement, which would not so entirely contradict her frequent assertions that Sophie's affections were really given to Walter."

"But why should she have confessed that Arnold was tricked into the engagement?"

"Because no one can see him now and not be certain that he did not enter into it of his own free will."

"It is a horrible affair, altogether," said Sissie, with a shudder.

"Horrible! And you think nothing can be done?"

"*I* cannot do more than I have done, Cousin Maria. You shall judge if I can;" and Sissie related the chief points of her conversation with Arnold.

"No, you can do no more," was Mrs. Rupert's comment. "And the poor boy must be sacrificed!"

"The poor boy must be sacrificed!" This was the refrain to all Sissie's thoughts at this time. It sounded in her ears when she woke in the morning and when she lay down at night, it moaned through the trees with the autumn wind, it rang out through the clear October air with the Monk's Kirk bells; and, worst of all, it was printed, in only too legible type, on Arnold's haggard face and weary, hollow eyes. It was a relief to her, and to many others, when the end of the Long Vacation took that haggard face away from Monk's Kirk, although it would only

be for a time, as the marriage was fixed for early in December, and Mr. and Mrs. Preston were already beginning to make arrangements for giving up Kirklands to the young couple.

CHAPTER VII.

SISSIE never forgot the days of dismal autumn weather which followed now. They were marked by no external events; indeed, her life had never been so monotonous; and yet, in after years, whenever her memory revisited the past, it was always this period which was found the most vividly impressed upon her mind. It seemed to her that she had suddenly become endued with a new faculty. Sometimes she fancied that Edmund's mantle had fallen upon her; the very fancy, so foreign to her usual matter-of-fact nature, proving that in a measure she was right. It was, indeed, the truth that the poetical sense, in which Edmund was

so rich, had only now been awakened in his sister—awakened to cast a sudden radiance through the November gloom, to glorify the miry lands and slippery moorsides, to make dull little Monk's Kirk an enchanted village, and the sombre old tower a fairy palace. And yet Sissie was not happy at this time. She told herself that she was most unhappy, that all was misery and disappointment. Her father still in unlawful possession of the property, the heir still undiscovered, and therefore still wronged; one brother missing, one weak in intellect, the other weak in health; her best friend oppressed with a grief from which there was no escape; herself weighed down by an obligation which she was powerless to discharge. And yet, in spite of all, and through it all, there shone that strange light—that wild exultant sense of being somehow higher and happier than any one had ever been before.

If Sissie had indulged more, or indulged with a keener relish, in sentimental literature, she might have known what this meant, and have armed herself against the danger. But, as it was, she yielded herself up blindly to the sweet intoxication, utterly unconscious of the sting which lay hid in its sweetness. The sting was not very long in making itself felt, however; for Sissie was too truthful to deceive herself more willingly than she would deceive others, and she could not, therefore, remain for any length of time unconscious of a feeling which had taken entire possession of her.

All through October she moved about in an odd kind of dream, avoiding company, without knowing why she did so, and indulging in long solitary walks, in weather when no one else cared to venture out. She was strangely happy in these walks, not thinking at all, but giving herself up quite passively to the novel impressions of beauty

and delight which were every moment produced upon her mind.

In the beginning of November there was a change. Her dream became troubled. Her solitary walks were haunted by an ever-present sense of some impending evil, and her avoidance of company was stimulated by a hitherto unknown feeling of self-consciousness whenever she was with others, even with her intimate friends, the Blighs. Soon this so increased that the Blighs became, of all others, those whom she most dreaded to meet, and she would rather appear cold and unkind than run the risk of that terrible rush of blood to the face, and that terrible throbbing of the heart, which were the physical expressions of the sense of combined shame, dread, and regret that arose in her whenever certain subjects were alluded to. It was strange that she knew well what those subjects were long before she knew what it was that made them so painfully affect her.

One day that she had been obliged to go to the Rectory, Mrs. Rupert said, "The Rices have come back from London, with heaps of smart things, Adams tells me. Her sister is to make a great part of the trousseau. The victims are to be gorgeously arrayed for the sacrifice, I suppose."

"You don't call Sophie a victim, do you?" asked Sissie, trying to speak as unconcernedly as a tongue like a piece of leather, and the consciousness of crimson cheeks, would allow her.

"Not the worst victim, certainly. She is a victim, though, if it be true that her father is forcing her into this marriage. There is a report that Mr. Rice is in very embarrassed circumstances; that would account for his anxiety to get Sophie well married."

"Papa says he is concerned in some speculation with Mr. Preston," remarked Sissie.

"No, that is not the case; for he complained to my father that Mr. Preston wanted to keep all his good things to himself, and would not let him have a chance of them. Mr. Preston, who was by at the time, explained that this referred to his refusal to let Mr. Rice embark in some enterprise of his own."

"Papa says the war will be good for Mr. Preston's business," observed Sissie, anxious to change the subject of conversation, but afraid to do so too abruptly.

"His business ought to be good, for he is spending a great deal at Kirklands just now. If he can afford to keep up such a grand establishment entirely for the young people, his income must be very large."

This mention of "the young people" made Sissie discover that it was time to go home; and, in spite of Mrs. Rupert's reproaches for so seldom coming to the Rectory now, and staying such a short time

when she did come, she hurried off. Her martyrdom, however, was not to end so easily. In the village she met Sophie and Mr. Rice, who immediately began:

"We have been up to Kirklands, to see the improvements. Old Preston is doing the thing very handsomely. Sophie will have a drawing-room fit for a duchess."

"Oh, papa," cried Sophie, "how can you say so? It is such an old-fashioned room, nothing will ever make it what it ought to be."

"That is Arnold's fault," returned Mr. Rice. "I don't wish to hurt your feelings, Soph, but I must say he is a most pig-headed fellow in some things. Would you believe it, Miss Monk? He won't have those old out-of-date windows touched; so, as Sophie says, no amount of expensive furniture and elegant decoration will make the room what it ought to be."

There came across Sissie's mind—why did it come just then? she had never

thought of it since—the remembrance of standing with Arnold in one of those quaint old windows, and telling him how much she preferred them to any newer fashion. She could recall the very glow of gratification which crossed his face, as he agreed with her, and compared her taste to that of most girls of her age. As she thought of this a sympathetic glow came into her own face, and the glow became a flame as Sophie remarked, superciliously:

"Poor Arnold does not understand such things. I shall have to polish his tastes a little."

"I have always considered that Mr. Arnold Preston had the most refined taste of any one I ever met with!" exclaimed Sissie, hardly attempting to conceal the indignation she felt. That one of the Rices —"those snobs," as Herbert used to call them—should presume to talk of *polishing* Arnold Preston!

Sissie attributed to this just indignation the beating heart and trembling limbs, which obliged her to take a hasty leave of Mr. Rice and his daughter. She did not recover her composure till she had walked some distance, and then the impulse seized her to go back to Kirklands, and see the house once more before it was desecrated by the Rices. She had never been there since the engagement—she had felt as if she could not bear the sight of Mr. and Mrs. Preston's sad faces in the home which they were to give up to an undesired daughter-in-law. The last time she was at Kirklands—soon after her return from Wiltshire—her mind had been full of Julia Colquhoun and her strange wooers. Now she would go and look at it once more as Arnold's home—she would think only of Arnold—poor, honest, true-hearted Arnold, who had been duped into marrying a designing woman who had not sufficient refine-

ment to appreciate even his most obvious merits.

In this frame of mind Sissie found that what she had undertaken was almost beyond her strength. The nearer she got to Kirklands, the more painful became her pitiful, regretful thoughts of Arnold. Scenes which she had forgotten till now rose up before her. Words and looks of his flashed upon her so vividly that they seemed to belong more to the present than to the past. Inside the house all was confusion. Mr. and Mrs. Preston were both in the hall, giving directions to some workmen. Portmanteaus and boxes were heaped up in one corner.

"Are you going away so soon?" asked Sissie, glancing at these signs of travelling, as she shook hands with Mrs. Preston.

"To-morrow morning," was the mournful answer. "But we shall return for a few days next month."

"The fact is, Miss Monk," said Mr. Preston, as his wife led the way into the drawing-room, "all this is a little too much for us both. Not that we should grudge to turn out for the dear boy and his wife, if it was all as we could wish; far from it, my dear. I am sure, for my part, there's nothing I should like better than to make this house all that heart could wish, and then to say to him, 'It's yours, my boy;' that is, if I thought he was going to be happy in it, which I don't now——"

"Never mind that at present, John," put in Mrs. Preston, smiling through the tears which filled her eyes. "Our family troubles will not interest Miss Monk."

Sissie went up to Mrs. Preston, and took her hand; she longed to throw her arms round the gentle, sweet-looking little woman, and to sob upon her neck, but she only said, "Indeed, dear Mrs. Preston, they do interest me very much."

"Indeed they do, my lass," cried Mr. Preston, heartily; "I know that. I haven't watched your face in church for nothing. I saw the way you looked at our poor boy that first Sunday. It *was* a pity, now, you couldn't fancy him! Ah, mother, we should have felt rather different now—you and me—if that was the daughter-in-law we were going to give up to. I think I can see poor Arnold's face now—the way he used to look at you, my dear; for all the world as if he'd like to eat you up. Do you remember that time before the sworry, Mary? 'Is that the note for Miss Monk, mother? You won't forget Miss Monk, mother? Hadn't I better take Miss Monk's note myself, mother?' Dear, dear, poor lad! Only to think of the change in him since then. Now it is, 'Just as you like; do what you think best, mother; it's all the same to me;' not caring a hang about anything after once he found we were quite deter-

mined to give up the house to him and his bride. Before that, I must say he would have his say out—and he fought terrible hard to make us stay here, and let him go right away somewhere. But we always had promised ourselves that, when our boy married, we'd go and live quiet-like by ourselves—what's the good of all this grandeur to us, when we haven't got him?—so we couldn't give that up. And then he said, 'Well, if I must have the place,' says he, 'let them'—that's the Rices—'do just whatever they like with it, only except one thing, the drawing-room window must *not* be touched.' Miss Sophie was finely put out about that. 'And you'll have this window modernised,' says she. 'And that I won't,' says I, 'for Arnold's express wishes were, "Don't let this window be touched;" 'and I won't have it touched,' says I; 'no, not if her gracious Majesty herself said, "modernise this window."' I believe you,

Miss Sophie did look glum. Ah!" and the good man gave a deep sigh, as he finished speaking.

Sissie had taken her seat on a low stool beside Mrs. Preston. Sad and heavy as her heart was, she felt a strange kind of contentment in sitting thus, and looking every now and then into the pretty, sorrowful face of Arnold's mother. Unlike as they were at first sight, every turn of Arnold's countenance was now so imprinted on Sissie's memory, that she had little difficulty in tracing a resemblance between the mother and the son. There was the same fair hair, the same straight, broad brow, the same nondescript nose, and the same even, white teeth. But here the likeness ceased. The deep, earnest brown eyes, with their long lashes and beautifully shaped lids, the round, firm chin, and the mobile, expressive lips were Arnold's own, as well as the bronzed skin, and dark, bushy eyebrows.

Mrs. Preston's eyes were blue, her complexion very delicate, and her whole face was entirely deficient in the vigour which so remarkably characterised her son's.

It seemed almost as if Mr. Preston were following Sissie's thoughts, when he asked, "Have you seen our boy's likeness, Miss Monk," placing in her hand a pretty sketch in water-colours of Arnold's head.

"That was done when he was in London," Mr. Preston explained. "There was a painter friend of his took a fancy to his head for a picture of some sort he was making; and, as we thought it was our boy to the very life, the painter chap was good enough to let us have it copied by some poor fellow that was glad to earn a few guineas; and very well he's done it too, though Miss Sophie doesn't like it. If *you* like it, my dear, you're very welcome to a copy: we've got more than we want."

Sissie did not know what to say. She

had an intense desire for the portrait, and yet she somehow shrank from possessing it.

"If you don't care for it, say so, my dear," observed Mr. Preston, in a slightly mortified tone, seeing Sissie's hesitation. "We won't force his likeness on any one, poor boy."

"I should like to have it very much," said Sissie then, "if you are quite sure you can spare one."

"To be sure; to be sure, my dear. Lord bless your heart! there's no one he'd be so glad should have his picture. But I forgot; we mustn't talk about that now. Dear me! If that could have come about! What a pity you don't fancy him, my dear!"

Mrs. Preston, compassionating her visitor's evident distress, hastened to change the subject; and, soon after, the rapidly-waning light warned Sissie that it was time to go home. As she said "good-bye," she

could not refrain from kissing Mrs. Preston, though the next moment she was covered with confusion for having done so. Mr. Preston insisted upon walking home with her, and entertained her the whole way with praise of Arnold, and moanings over his impending fate. "That little bit of mincing tomfoolery isn't fit to hold a candle to our boy," was his conclusion, as Sissie parted from him at Monk's Own.

The Rector dined at the Tower that day, as he often did; and in the evening, as he was preparing to leave, he said to Sissie, "Well, our grand wedding is near at hand now. By all accounts we are to astonish the natives. Maria draws a long face about the whole affair; but I don't think it is so bad as all that. Sophie Rice may be a little skittish, and fond of getting a lot of men about her, but she is not such a reprobate as they make out, I'll be bound. Why, if young Preston has been tricked into

this, as Maria says, the man must be a fool not to cut and run."

"He is not a fool," returned Sissie, hotly. "It is because he is the most honest and noble-minded man that ever——" she stopped, ashamed of her own vehemence, blushed crimson, and, meeting Dr. Bligh's glance of inquiring surprise, fairly fled from the room. When alone, she began to reproach herself for having stopped short in her defence of her friend. Why should she be ashamed to say what she thought of him? —especially when others were unjust to him. What was this absurd cowardice which now made her shrink from acting and speaking naturally? She used never to mind what people thought of her. She used never to colour in this school-girlish manner, when there was not the slightest occasion for colouring. And why was she to be afraid now of what it gave her pleasure to look at? Why should she have

hidden Arnold's likeness, as if there were something wrong in having it, when his own father and mother had given it to her? She would overcome this weakness; and so thinking, she walked to the drawer in which she had carefully put away the portrait, and seated herself with it in her hand. Even now she shrank from looking at the face, and held it for some time turned away from herself. Almost unconsciously she, at last, turned the paper round, and began to gaze at the sketch. She sat thus for nearly an hour; and, if any one could have seen her, they might have judged of her varying emotions by the colour which came and went in her face. She was retracing all her intercourse with Arnold; recalling all the words of tenderness he had said to her; remembering with compunction her coldness to his love; remembering with shame her forwardness in his trouble. How was it possible that she could have

offered herself to him? and how could she have lived through it when he rejected her advances—even tenderly as he had done it? How tender he had always been to her! What a series of benefits he had heaped upon her! Their whole acquaintance had been made up of services on his part, and black ingratitude on hers. How cruel—what a mockery it was—to consent to marry him—to offer even to marry him—whilst telling him she could not love him! How could he have been so generous to her? How could he have foreborne to resent such heartless insensibility—such cold misunderstanding of his feelings? Why did she understand his feelings so much better now? As Sissie put this question to herself she grew hot all over, and the crimson blood mounted to the very roots of her hair. Suddenly she caught up the portrait, which she had laid on the table before her, and pressed it passionately to her burning

cheeks, forehead, and lips; then, starting up, she cried, "What absurd folly! And now that he is bound to another woman, too! What absurd, mad, wicked folly!"

Sissie did not go to bed all that night. Her fire went out, but she never felt the cold; her candles burnt down in their sockets, but she never noticed that she was in the dark. She was passing through a great crisis, and external things are unheeded at such moments. That light had come to her which, in a moment, changes a child into a woman. The old childish unconsciousness was gone for ever, and in its place had arisen the self-knowledge from which there is never after any escape.

The morning light which found Sissie thus changed, found her also prepared to meet the change which had come upon her. She was no sooner aware of the nature of her own feelings, than she recognised the necessity of doing battle with those feelings

by every means in her power. She must no longer remain in inaction; she must no longer indulge in day-dreams. She must not, she could not stay to witness the marriage preparations. As the first streak of dawn stole in at the window, she again put Arnold's portrait away—this time hiding it in the deepest recesses of an old bureau—never to be looked at again until she could look at it without a blush. Then she got the fragment of Henry Monk's letter, and by the faint morning light tried if any clue to direct a fresh search might possibly be found.

After a long examination, such a clue did present itself. The word which she had read "Amesbury," now came out clearly as "Aylesbury"—the tail of the *y* and the top of the *l* having been obliterated by some scratches which had crossed the paper. Before she went down to breakfast, Sissie had determined immediately to start for

Aylesbury, and she made her intention known to her father as soon as possible. She would not take Clement with her, as he was too delicate to be exposed to the risks of travelling in the winter; and she therefore had no companion but old Phœbe, on whose fidelity and discretion every reliance could be placed.

The search this time was not more successful than the last, though "Rooke," the stationer, was soon found. The name of Monk, however, was not on his books; and he could not remember ever having had a customer who answered to the description of Henry Monk. He had, however, a list of the families living in the county within the last ten years, and amongst these was a Mrs. Monk—at Oldport. To Oldport Sissie went, and soon found that Mrs. Monk had been a widow for several years, but had lately married the incumbent of a neighbouring parish. Mr. Monk had been well

known in Oldport; it might have been about sixteen years since his death; he was a tall, dark man, and his sons were very like him. There were two sons, who lived with their mother and their step-father's family at Slugstown.

The parsonage at Slugstown was a dilapidated, wretched-looking place. Three young men—one red-haired, and the other two as dark as gipsies—and two black-eyed, rosy-cheeked, loud-voiced girls, were standing in the sort of stable-yard through which the house had to be reached. Just as Sissie's fly drew up, another girl, with a still louder voice, and still bolder manner than the others, came up on horseback, with a young man in a hunting-coat and boots, with whom she was laughing boisterously as they rode into the yard; and whom the other girls greeted as "Bob Sleigh," with the easy and noisy good-fellowship which Sissie had hitherto only seen amongst men to-

wards each other. These riders were followed by an older man—also in hunting costume—though his coat was black instead of pink. All the party stared at Sissie, but the fox-hunting parson was the only one who was sufficiently like a gentleman to lift his hat to her.

When Sissie had heard the most disreputable-looking of the young men addressed as John Monk, and had found the mother busily engaged with another lady upon what she knew—from having seen a similar document in Stephen Rice's possession—to be a betting-book, it was an intense relief to her to find that the former husband of this model clergyman's wife had certainly not died for two years after the date on Henry Monk's memorial tablet.

Sissie prosecuted her search for three weeks longer in this neighbourhood, without meeting with any encouraging prospect of success. But success seemed of less con-

sequence to her now than it had been in her former search in Wiltshire. Then her sole object had been to find the lawful heir, that he might be restored to his rights, and that her father might be saved from longer persistence in an act of dishonesty. All the steps necessary to this end were to her a painful toil—a toil which must be borne that the end might be reached. Now, however, the search had become a labour of love. Formerly she had acted upon Arnold's dictum, because that dictum approved itself to her sense of right. Now, the feeling that she was toiling—even unknown to him—in a path which he would approve, sweetened every step of the way. She tried to banish all thoughts of Arnold from her mind, and deceived herself with the idea that she was doing so; but in reality she was upheld in every undertaking by the fancy that whilst *he* was suffering for her sake—for there could be no doubt that but for her his

suffering in his present engagement would be much less intense—she was labouring for his sake; for without his decision, "The wrong *must* be set right, at any cost," she would never have embarked in this difficult enterprise.

With these feelings, and with the desire to keep away from Monk's Own as long as possible, Sissie persevered in her search after the clue, on which she had started, had utterly failed; and she would have persevered much longer had not her father begged her to return home before Christmas.

CHAPTER VIII.

When Sissie returned into Yorkshire, three days before Christmas, she was met at the station by her father and Mr. Warren, who, as she already knew from Sir Percy's letters, had been a guest at Monk's Own for the last week. Sir Percy had never written a word about the marriage of which Sissie's mind was full, and she now dared not ask what she so dreaded to know. The time fixed had been *early* in December, and there could, therefore, be little doubt that it was long since over, yet Sissie could not feel that it was over. Before she left Buckinghamshire, she had been attacked by a wild, frantic longing to see Arnold once more

before his marriage. This she had reasoned and scolded away; but then came the desire to see, at any rate, his portrait once again, before it should be wrong for her to look at it as she had looked at it that night when it had served as a mirror to show her the real nature of her own feelings. This desire had grown stronger and stronger as she got nearer home, and with it had grown the dread of learning what must forbid its gratification.

Sissie's heart sank as she saw the close carriage which had been chosen for the long drive, the evening being bitterly cold and raw. In her present mood she had looked to a gallop over the downs, or, at least, a good blow in the waggonette, as the only escape from suffocation. To be boxed up in such a small space with her father and a stranger seemed to her a refinement of torture which it was beyond human nature to endure.

A long talk on indifferent subjects had set Sissie's mind more at rest, and given her

the hope that she might escape the hearing of any Monk's Kirk news during the drive when, as they reached the village, the church bells broke out in a joyous peal.

"There are the marriage-bells," remarked Sir Percy.

Then it was over, Sissie thought.

"It is too dark to-night to see all the magnificence of the triumphal arches," observed Mr. Warren, "but doubtless you will have a good view to-morrow. I suppose you are to be a bridesmaid, Miss Monk?"

Then it was not over yet.

"Boyd tells me that the bridegroom looks more fit to be buried than to be married," remarked Sir Percy.

"He ought to be a happy man," said Mr. Warren. "His bride is a lovely girl. There *is* young Preston," he added, as he looked out of the window on Sissie's side of the carriage.

Sissie instinctively sprang forward. Once

more, then, she should see him! But when her face was at the window her courage failed. She saw his form, but she dared not look at him, she dared not see his face.

"He certainly hangs his head with a most dejected air for a happy man," remarked Sir Percy, who, sitting with his back to the horses, could see Arnold longer than the others could. "I am afraid the long journey in this cold weather has been too much for you, my darling," Sir Percy added, tenderly, as Sissie sank back in her seat. "You are as white as a sheet."

Those dreadful bells! If only Sissie had been free to scream, scream, scream, till she outscreamed their horrid clangour! And now again came Mrs. Rupert's words, and the bells were pealing forth, as if in mocking triumph, "The—poor—boy—must—be—sac—ri—ficed! The—poor—boy—must—be—sac—ri—ficed!" It seemed to Sissie as if they had been driving on for years, in a

kind of nightmare dream, to the sound of those horrid bells, when the carriage at last stopped at Monk's Own, and Sir Percy said kindly to her, "There, go and lie down, dear, and don't trouble yourself about coming down to dinner; you only look fit for bed." Sissie never knew how she managed to speak at all coherently to her brothers and the servants, who stood smiling in her way, but at last it was over, and she could escape to her own room, and burying her head in the bed-clothes, try to shut out sound and thought together.

Presently old Phœbe came with some tea, and Sissie had to rouse herself; and then, finding the bells had stopped, she resolved to conquer her weakness and to join the dinner party, knowing that, in Edmund's presence, no mention would be made of what was to happen to-morrow. Edmund did not appear to be suffering from the thought of that to-morrow. His manner was listless,

and his face more vacant than it had been during the summer, but there was no sign in him of any distress of mind. Suddenly, as the servants were clearing the table, Sissie again heard the bells; she shuddered. "Do you feel the draught, dear?" asked Sir Percy. "Empson, shut the door."

"Do you hear the bells, papa?" asked Clement, who had just come in to dessert. "Ain't they plain, to-night? What are they ringing for?"

"Practising for Christmas, I suppose, my boy," returned his father, with a glance at Edmund, who looked quite unconcerned. If Sir Percy had looked at his daughter instead of his son, he might have seen cause to change the object of his solicitude.

Poor Sissie passed another sleepless night. She had the treat she had promised herself; she took Arnold's portrait out from its hiding-place, and sat down to study it well, *for the last time*, but it was more than she

could bear. The artist, whether for the purposes of his picture, or because his model was not in good spirits at the time, had caught a sad, plaintive expression, which was not habitual in Arnold's countenance, but which Sissie had more than once seen in it, the expression which had reminded her of her poor dog. As she looked at the sketch now, this expression seemed to reproach her for suffering Arnold to be sacrificed—to appeal to her for rescue from the fate which to-morrow was to bring.

Considering that this sad night was to be followed by that fearful to-morrow, the daylight came all too quickly. When twelve o'clock was near, Sissie opened the window to listen for the bells, but, to her relief, they were silent. The wind must have changed in the night, or, perhaps, the fast-falling rain checked the sound. Sissie rejoiced in this rain; it would prevent any intercourse between Monk's Own and Monk's Kirk.

Sir Percy, she knew, would never think of going to the wedding, and Mr. Warren, unless he were much altered, was not the man to get wet unnecessarily.

So the day passed away; no one went and no one came. Sissie kept Clement by her side all the afternoon, and carefully avoided speaking to any of the servants. She felt, however, that these precautions were needless, as the Monk's Kirk people would all be too busy with the wedding to bring the news of it over to Monk's Own to-day. Nevertheless, every stir in the house made her tremble. She could not bear to let her father or either of her brothers out of her sight, and she talked without ceasing, that no one might speak of what she so dreaded to hear. Suddenly the thought which she was trying to avoid would overpower her, and then she would fly to her own room, only to fly back in a few minutes, in the fear that the news might come in her absence.

The next day was bright and cold, and Sir Percy proposed to his guest a shooting expedition over the moors—to Sissie's great satisfaction, in the opposite direction to that of Monk's Kirk. All day she kept her brothers entertained with an interesting book, and when the sportsmen returned, she pleaded fatigue, and went to her room, rigorously excluding Phœbe, as well as the younger maid who had now superseded the old nurse in her more active duties.

After another night, Sissie, with the inconsistency natural to those who suffer, began to desire some certainty, as much as she had before shunned it, and she therefore went with the others to the Christmas-day service at Monk's Kirk. On reaching the village her panic returned, and she hurried into the church, without looking to the right or to the left. As Walter Bligh began the exhortation, she raised her eyes for the first time, and they fell on Arnold Preston, who

was looking at her, not with the despairing agony of their last meeting, but with grave and thoughtful earnestness. Sissie could not return his look with one of frank goodwill, as she would have done three months ago. Now her eyes sank at once before his, and her face turned first red, and then very pale. She was glad to fall upon her knees, but whilst the rest of the congregation were engaged in the general confession, *her* act of worship was a fervent thanksgiving. She did not know what could have happened, but she knew, at any rate, that he was still free, and was no longer in despair: that was cause enough for thankfulness.

A feeling of shyness prompted Sissie to remain in the pew, thus, of course, detaining all the Monk's Own party, till Mr. Preston and his son had left the church; but her manœuvre did not prevent a meeting, for the others were waiting for them in the churchyard. Sissie was pale, trembling,

and quite unable to speak or look up, when Arnold took her passive hand, and said, in deep, heartfelt tones, but without a trace of agitation, "I wish you every happiness you could wish for this Christmas, and for every Christmas."

In the meantime Mr. Preston had gone on with Sir Percy, and was talking earnestly to him. Arnold walked in silence beside Sissie as far as the Rectory garden-gate, where his father had stopped. The Blighs were all on the other side of the gate.

"Will not you come in, Mr. Preston?" inquired Mrs. Rupert's cordial voice.

"No, thank you, ma'am, I must go to my missus. And our boy here has to be off to London at 5 o'clock to-morrow morning. The mother will want all she can get of him to-day, poor soul."

"Are you going to London also?" asked Sir Percy.

"No. I must be at Dorlington. Will

some of you ladies go and look up my missus while we are both away, me and the boy? She'll be lonesome-like, perhaps, by herself just now." As Mr. Preston spoke, he looked at Sissie, who, making a vigorous effort, answered:

"I will go to her, Mr. Preston. I shall be so glad to go."

Arnold, who had been standing a little apart, drew nearer as Sissie spoke. "Thank you," he said, in the same low, earnest tone, in which he had before spoken. "My mother will think it very kind."

Sissie would have given a great deal for power to look in his face, but she could not whilst she felt that his eyes were fixed upon her. When he and his father had said good-bye to the whole party, and walked quickly away, she turned round, and noticed the cheerful erectness of his bearing now compared to what it had been when she last saw him. Her father, also, was watching the

retreating figures. "Is that off, Maria?" he said, turning to Mrs. Rupert, who had remained at the gate, whilst the rest of the party had gone towards the house.

"I fancy so, by his happy looks. Did you notice that none of the Rices were at church this morning?"

"Yes. What does your woman's wit gather from that?"

"That they have broken off the engagement, and are ashamed to show their faces."

"This is a sad thing about Preston," remarked Sir Percy.

"What, papa?" Sissie managed at last to inquire.

"He is ruined—has lost every stiver, as he expresses it."

A thrill of delight shot through Sissie—Arnold free and poor! Now if the heir could but be found, all would be well. The next moment she reproached herself for rejoicing at what was certainly a calamity.

"Does Mr. Preston seem to feel it much, papa?" she asked.

"He spoke in a very manly tone about it —said he regretted it principally on Arnold's account; and that he hoped, by the sale of Kirklands, to be able to discharge every liability, and begin afresh where he began before."

"Did he say how it happened?" asked Mrs. Rupert.

"He said that he had speculated more rashly lately than he ever did before, and made some allusion to an unusual pressure on trade just now—I don't understand enough about such things to be very clear as to his meaning. He told me that one great comfort to him was that he had dissuaded Rice from joining in the same speculation."

"That is lucky," remarked Mrs. Rupert. "It is bad enough for Mr. Rice to have lost a rich son-in-law, without losing his money besides."

"Poor Preston was quite overcome in speaking of his son. He says that nothing could exceed his consideration and honourable feeling. I always liked that young man."

"So did I," returned Mrs. Rupert; "and I am very glad he has shaken off his fetters."

Sissie could learn nothing as to how this shaking off had been accomplished, till she paid her promised visit to Mrs. Preston the next day. Contrary to her expectations, she met the master of the house coming out of the gate. Having thanked her most warmly for coming, and explained that he thought it better to get through some necessary business before leaving Kirklands, he said, as he walked back with her towards the house, "So, you see, my dear, we've got to turn out, bag and baggage, and not for our boy neither. Well, come what may, that's a mercy! Lord bless your heart, my dear! I wish you could have seen him when I told him what had happened. I didn't half like

the job, I can tell you; I felt sort of guilty, as if I was going to rob the boy, after making him such grand promises all these many years. I'd had a sort of inkling of what was coming, for a week or two, but I shouldn't have said anything—not just when I did—only I thought it wasn't acting quite on the square to let the marriage come off, and then say to Miss Sophie, 'You thought, perhaps, to be mistress of Kirklands, but you are just mistaken; the man you've took for your husband hasn't got the sight of worldly goods you thought, my fine young lady!' You see that wasn't the sort of thing to go down with our boy, nor more it wasn't with me, for the matter of that; so when I comes home the night before the wedding as was to be, and I knowing that every bit I'd scraped together was gone, and I was just where I was twenty year ago, I says to Arnold, when he met me on the road, 'My boy,' says I, 'I've got bad news

for you; we're ruined,' says I. And with that, what does that boy do, but shy his hat right up into the air, and shout out 'Hurrah! then I'm saved!' And then he falls to hugging and kissing me, and says I never told him better news in all his life. After that he drew up, and tried to put on a grave face, and said how sorry he was for me, and what could be done, and all that. But, Lord bless you, he couldn't hide the sparkle in his eyes; and that did my heart more good than if any one had come and told me it was all a mistake, and the money was quite safe."

"And did Mr. Rice break off the engagement then?" Sissie took courage to ask.

"Well, they shillied and shallied, till the boy was half mad with the suspense. First, Miss Sophie must needs do the sentimental, and say, what was money to her if her Arnold loved her, and all that, like the stage actresses do in the theatre. So the poor boy comes home that night with all the bright-

ness gone out of his face. Then, the next morning, comes Mr. Rice, and says he had put a stop to the wedding preparations, because he didn't think it seemly to be going on with rejoicings when I was in such a peck of troubles, and he thought I should prefer that the marriage should be put off a while; and I answered, 'Yes, I should prefer it.' And he asks a many questions, and pumps and pumps me, and you may be sure I didn't put too good a face on it. And he says his poor Sophie would break her heart if she had to give up Arnold; and so *he* goes away. And then, the next day, comes the old lady, and she must speak to my missus very particular, and very private. And the upshot of that is that her Sophie had been attached since her childhood to Captain Bligh, but her father thought so much of Arnold, that he had set his heart on her having *him*; and the poor girl was so obedient that she could not refuse to do as her pa bid her,

and she had been trying to love Arnold as she ought to; but now her father said she might please herself, and she couldn't forget the old love, and if Arnold would release her—— You may believe my missus didn't let her waste her breath after this, and we soon sent the old lady packing, with all she wanted, and perhaps a little more; and then, to make sure, Arnold goes himself, and sees the father, and tells him not to make himself at all uneasy, for no one could blame *him*; and he sees Miss Sophie, and tells her he is glad to hear she's to please herself, and she needn't fear that any one will blame *her*; and then he comes back, and kisses and hugs his mother and me, and blesses the knaves that did me, and my folly in being done, and I don't know what all; and I'll tell you what's the truth, my dear, if it hadn't been for this con—founded engagement, I should have been as well to do this day as ever; for it all came of my not having the heart to look

properly after things ; and then I thought if the boy wasn't to be happy, he'd need to be all the richer ; so I just caught at the first frothy tomfoolery that came in my way, and it ended in froth and sent all my money off in bubbles. But, thank Heaven! I'm the only sufferer. There'll be plenty to pay up all the liabilities, and my boy says he won't rest day nor night till all's paid—nor more won't I, say I. And now, if you'll just step in, my dear, you'll find the missus somewhere about, and you'll be a comfort to her. She's a little down-hearted this morning, poor soul! and no wonder. Good-day to you, my dear, and thank you kindly for coming to us in our trouble. This is being a true friend—none of your sunshine ones, that make off when the clouds come up."

The conduct of the Rice family was a greater puzzle than ever to Sissie and her friends for the next few weeks. But the opportune remembrance of poor Wilfred

was explained when it came out that, in spite of Mr. Preston's warning, Mr. Rice had speculated secretly in the enterprise which had so fully verified that warning, and had not only lost everything, but incurred liabilities quite beyond his power to discharge. Having at the same time become aware that the large fortune which had been Arnold's great attraction was irrecoverably gone, Mr. Rice was only anxious to secure for his daughter a means of escape from the family ruin; whilst his wife, having always opposed herself to the ill-treatment of Wilfred, for whom she had the strongest liking of which her cold nature was capable, at once brought forward the claims of this long faithful and heartlessly jilted lover.

This sudden revival of the vague suspicion, long more or less rife in Monk's Kirk, of some sort of engagement between Wilfred and Sophie, was warmly favoured by Caroline, whose confidences to Walter had ended in

so good an understanding between the two, that she no longer needed the passport to his favour which she had formerly sought in encouraging his hopes with regard to her sister. In fact, her genuine liking for Walter had placed her in such favourable contrast to Sophie's heartless fickleness, that, when the crash came, and all Monk's Kirk knew that the Rices were reduced almost to beggary, it was to Cara, instead of to Sophie, that an escape from the family ruin was offered by the most patient and long-suffering of her sister's former lovers.

The men of the family, who had regarded a connection with the Blighs as quite beneath their notice, were now ready enough to welcome Walter as their future son and brother-in-law; and they would have been glad to have felt as sanguine as the ladies did as to the result of a conciliatory and apologetic letter which Mr. Rice despatched to Wilfred. In the meantime Sophie was

not idle. Mr. Warren, who had discovered her charms when he looked upon her as quite beyond his reach, did not find them less now that it seemed pretty certain that she might be won by the first man that chose to try; and, as the issue of the advance to Wilfred must remain long uncertain, Sophie did not think it desirable to thwart the first beginnings of such a laudable attempt. Opportunities for frequent meetings were furnished by negotiations between her father and her new admirer for the sale and purchase of the Hermitage; Mr. Warren, who was beginning to tire of the monotony of Cover-heath, having conceived a wish to settle in the neighbourhood of Monk's Kirk.

Other negotiations of a similar nature were going on at the same time. Kirklands was to be sold at once, and Sir Percy, who, from old Sir John having died without making a will, had inherited a large amount

of funded property, and had, moreover, during his occupancy of Monk's Own, never spent above half his income, was resolved to buy an estate which had formerly belonged to the Monks, and the recovery of which had been an object of ambition in the family for many generations. As both the negotiators in this matter were only anxious to deal fairly by the other, it was soon brought to a satisfactory conclusion, and Sir Percy became the owner of Kirklands, with all the decorations and embellishments which had been lavished upon it during the last year and a half. Mr. Preston removed with his wife into a small house at Dorlington, which he had occupied before his marriage, when he first became possessed of the ironworks there. These works had now to go with all the rest of his property; but an engagement on them as overseer necessitated his continued residence in the town. No false shame hindered this simple-minded man

from accepting an inferior position in a place where he had formerly been looked upon as one of the most influential personages.

All these arrangements naturally took some time, and it was the beginning of March before Arnold came to Monk's Own to take leave. He asked for Sir Percy, but, as Sissie was in the library with her father, she was saved from the embarrassment of being afterwards summoned to see him. Arnold looked thinner and older than before the trials of the last autumn and winter, but he was very composed, and talked of the change in his prospects with manly courage.

"And what are you thinking of doing?" asked Sir Percy.

"That is the difficulty," returned Arnold. "At my age it is very difficult to get into anything for which one has had no previous training. Of course the best opening now for a man without capital is to be found in the colonies"—(Sissie turned pale)—"but I

cannot leave my father and mother. The only thing that suggests itself to me at present is a private tutorship. I should prefer a lower mastership in one of the public schools, but not having taken my degree puts that out of the question."

"What would you say to a Government office, or to a private secretaryship?"

"The Government clerks are so ill paid—and for the other, it requires more influence than I could command."

"If there is anything I could do—" began Sir Percy.

"You are very kind. You could help me best, I believe, by bearing me in mind, and if you should meet with any one who would think my services worth two hundred pounds a year, mentioning my name and capabilities."

"Then you are quite bent on the tutorship? I should think it a most unpleasant position."

"So should I. But it pays better than anything else; and if I can sell my liberty at a high price, that is all I care about."

"But I have heard that a private tutor has so many unavoidable expenses, that the position does not really pay well."

"There are no *unavoidable* expenses when a man has such an incentive as I have to avoid them. You will think me very mercenary"— with a quick glance at Sissie, at whom he had not looked before—"but it is not for myself."

"I know," said Sir Percy. "I quite understand. It is for your father and mother."

"Not that they are in any actual need of money," pursued Arnold. "My mother's little property quite suffices for their wants. But my father has been so uniformly generous to me—has so instantly gratified all my wishes, reasonable or unreasonable—that I should be a monster of ingratitude if I could not put myself to a little discomfort

in order to make him some return—now that I have the opportunity of doing it."

Sir Percy, who was always quickly touched by any trait of nobleness, held out his hand to Arnold, without speaking. After a short silence, he asked, "Would you think my boy too great a charge?"

Arnold's face flushed crimson as he asked, "Do you mean Edmund?"

"Yes. He is now certainly capable of some kind of study, and *you* have an influence over him which no one else can acquire. I should be under the deepest obligation to you, if you would undertake the task—I know a most trying one—of counteracting as much as can be his inevitable disadvantages."

Arnold's face was very pale now. He tried to speak, but seemed unable to get the words out. He looked towards Sissie, but looked away again, without meeting her eye. At last he said, "I—I—thank you—Sir

Percy—I can't say how much I thank you —but—may I speak to you about this at another time?"

"Certainly," returned Sir Percy. "Take your own time to consider of it."

"Are Mr. and Mrs. Preston comfortably settled at Dorlington?" asked Sissie, after some minutes—making an effort to break the awkward silence which had ensued on Arnold's last words.

"Very comfortably. I think, in fact, they are much more comfortable than they were at Kirklands. The truth is, I believe, that all the state which they thought necessary on my account was nothing but a bore to them, and they are heartily glad to be rid of it. I really think, if I were out of the question, they would rejoice in the change. Is that one o'clock? I must go, then. I have to catch the 2.15 train."

Arnold never looked in Sissie's face as he held her trembling hand for a moment in a

loose clasp. Just at last his fingers tightened upon hers, and he gave a short gasping sigh —checked instantly—as he turned quickly away, and walked out of the room, Sir Percy following.

"You will let me know what you decide," said Sir Percy, when they reached the hall-door.

"I should not have a moment's hesitation, Sir Percy—your proposal is all that I could wish—but—I cannot live in the same house with Sis—with Miss Monk."

"I believe we shall be able to manage that," returned Sir Percy, quickly.

CHAPTER IX.

Sir Percy explained his last words to Arnold, in a letter which he despatched that same day. His plan was that the two young men should have a separate establishment in the old cottage at Cóver-heath, where Edmund would be far removed from all the agitating associations of the last few years, and would be surrounded by the happy memories of his childhood. Arnold joyfully agreed to the proposal—only demurring at the extreme liberality of the offer made to him. His objections on this score were, however, overruled by Sir Percy, who contended that the position ought to be lucrative in proportion to its exceedingly

aying and responsible nature. Andrews and his wife were to remain in the house as before—Phœbe, a younger maid, and Edmund's man completing the indoor establishment, whilst Fire-fly, the best horse in the Monk's Own stables, another fine hunter which had been Herbert's, and a steady old cob, were added to the outdoor stock. When these arrangements were completed, Arnold came to fetch his charge—arriving from Dorlington at night, that they might start by the first train the next morning, in order to reach Cover-heath the same day.

The missing, and yet impending heir was no longer to Sissie an impassable barrier between herself and Arnold. She had once said that she did not know how to "love" —as Arnold used the word; now she knew this so well, that all outward obstacles seemed to her as nothing when weighed against her love. She no longer thought

that Arnold would care whether she were the daughter of Sir Percy Monk of Monk's Own, or of simple Captain Monk of poor barren Cover-heath. And as for her father's faults —if Mrs. Preston were in league with a gang of forgers, would that lower Arnold one hair's-breadth in her eyes?

Reasoning, or rather feeling, thus, with all the singleness of a woman's view, Sissie could not understand the change in Arnold's manner towards her, and even her intense pleasure in being under the same roof with him for at least twelve hours did not counterbalance the pain of his coldness. Only twice did he show anything of his old emotion in speaking to her. The first time was when, soon after his arrival, he asked with a shy, embarrassed glance at her, "Have you heard any news to-day?"

"No," returned Sissie, colouring with pleasure at even that faint sparkle of the well-remembered glow in his eyes.

"You have not seen any of the Monk's Kirk people, then?"

"No; no one."

"I met Mr. Warren on my way from the station," said Arnold, looking still more confused. "I was surprised to find he had left Monk's Own."

"He left more than a month ago," returned Sir Percy. "He is staying now at The Bells, in Monk's Kirk. You know he has bought the Hermitage—but he has begged the Rices to stay there for the present."

"Does the news concern him?" cried Sissie, eagerly.

"Yes," answered Arnold; and for a moment the old, burning glance rested upon her—dyeing her face and neck with crimson.

"He is engaged to——" Sissie could not say Sophie Rice, but Arnold understood her, and coloured as deeply as herself.

"To Sophie Rice," he said, quickly recovering his composure.

"I thought that was in the wind," remarked Sir Percy. "Well, Warren is a bold man."

"'None but the brave deserve the fair,'" quoted Arnold, with a bright smile of contentment.

When Arnold entered the breakfast-room at five o'clock the next morning, Sissie was at the table, ready to dispense the tea and coffee. There being no one else in the room, Arnold hesitated, and for a moment seemed tempted to retreat. But he thought better of it, and came forward, saying, "How good of you to get up so early this cold morning. Edmund ought to be——" Something in Sissie's face made him stop suddenly, and shake hands with her in silence.

"I am afraid you will have a cold journey," remarked Sissie, forcing herself to speak.

Arnold made no answer. He was leaning against the chimney-piece—looking very pale by the light of the fire and the dim candles.

"It will be dark before you get to Cover-heath," continued Sissie—feeling that this silence was unendurable. "I wonder what you will think of it to-morrow morning?"

"You are very fond of Cover-heath?" asked Arnold—raising his eyes at last.

"Oh, yes! Dear old Cover-heath!"

There was another embarrassing silence, broken by Arnold suddenly asking, in hoarse, deep tones, "How can I ever repay your father for this kindness to me?"

"Papa quite feels that the kindness is on your side. Not many people would—would——" Sissie stopped. She could not go on whilst he looked at her like that. Arnold walked hastily to the window, which was still closed up for the night. Standing at that distance, he turned round, and said,

"Only a villain would take a mean advantage of such kindness. Don't you think so?"

"A mean advantage!" repeated Sissie—not understanding his meaning, and frightened at his agitated, almost stern manner. "What mean advantage could be taken?"

"It might be *attempted*," said Arnold, drawing nearer, with still the same strange, wild look, and agitated manner. "I might be villain enough to attempt it, Sissie; and I shall, too—unless—I will see if Edmund is nearly ready," he cried, with a sudden change of tone, as he left the room abruptly.

Arnold had quite recovered his self-possession when he returned, and during the hurried breakfast, and the short leave-taking, he was as calm and cool as if he could never be otherwise.

Sissie looked eagerly for Edmund's first letter from Cover-heath, and unsatisfactory as the boy's letters always were in them-

selves, the few childish ill-written lines had a deep interest for her:—

"DEAR PAPA,

"Arnold says I must tell you we got here very well. He likes Cover-heath very much, and so do I. I don't remember it much. We have been for a long ride this morning. Arnold says I am to tell you I am quite well. We have been reading this morning. I remember the book we read out of. I send some violets for Sissie. Arnold picked them on grandpapa's grave. He said I was to give them to Sissie; but it wasn't *I* that picked them, so I cannot give them. It is his present. This morning we saw an opening, oh so bright! far, far away, through the black wood, and I thought it was like Hope shining through a dark life. And Arnold said, the faster and steadier we walked in the straight path, the nearer we should get to the Hope we saw in the dis-

tance; but if we turned into a crooked path, we should lose sight of Hope. My head aches with writing so much, so good-bye, dear papa.

"Your affectionate son,

"EDMUND."

Clement was not very well at this time, and Sissie was too much occupied with him to go into Monk's Kirk. A few days, however, after she had heard of Sophie's new engagement, she had a visit from Walter Bligh, whom she had scarcely spoken to since his own matrimonial arrangements had been made public.

"So Monk's Kirk has got some fresh excitement, Uncle Walter," she said, after all Walter's questions about Edmund had been answered.

"Yes," replied Walter, slowly. "It is a very strange thing, is it not?"

"What does Cara say to it?"

"She does not like Warren; but, of course,

she is glad of it for Sophie. It is a pity Wilfred was so unforgiving."

"In what way?" asked Sissie, rather astonished at Walter's mode of expressing himself.

"You know Mr. Rice wrote to him about Sophie; I have no idea *how* he wrote. Cara was sorry that her father was the person to undertake it; but, at any rate, Wilfred answered in a very rude and vindictive spirit."

"But surely Uncle Wilfred could hardly be expected to forgive the—the—way he was treated," observed Sissie, hardly knowing how to understand Walter's present position in the Rice family.

"He must have known that poor Sophie only acted under compulsion in engaging herself to Arnold Preston; it was always quite evident that her own choice inclined to Wilfred."

Sissie remembered that Walter had not always thought thus, but she said nothing.

She also remembered that Walter was probably ignorant of what had taken place in his brother's last interview with Sophie, and that she must therefore be on her guard in talking to him on this subject.

"Sophie was much cut up by Wilfred's letter," Walter continued. "He certainly mentioned her in very harsh and unfeeling terms. I am not at all sure that I am not bound, as her future brother-in-law, to resent his most insulting expressions."

"Perhaps you hardly know how much provocation Uncle Wilfred has received," Sissie ventured to observe. "And Sophie has now got another champion to fight her battles for her."

"Poor girl! It was a very trying thing for her to have to decide so quickly about Warren."

"Why was it necessary to decide so quickly?"

"Don't you know? Mr. Rice could not

stay in England any longer. He and Stephen were obliged to go abroad the very night after he got Wilfred's letter, and it was just then that Warren found them all in great distress, and made his offer to Sophie. Mrs. Rice had agreed to follow her husband as soon as possible, and the girls would have had to go too, if they had not made other arrangements."

Sissie was amused at a Bligh having so completely adopted the tone of the Rice family, as to speak in this businesslike manner on such a subject.

"And what will they do now?" she asked.

"That is the difficulty," replied Walter. "Maria wanted them to come to our house, but Mrs. Rice would not hear of that. Of course the marriages will take place as soon as possible."

"The marriages!" exclaimed Sissie. "Then are you and Mr. Warren to be married at the same time?"

"Yes. There is no necessity for delay in either case. My father has made a most liberal increase to my salary, and we have agreed to take Mr. Boyd's old house. Warren is all impatience to get settled in the Hermitage with his bride, but of course the Rices cannot remain there now."

"Would they come here?" asked Sissie, timidly.

"That is just what I hoped you might propose, to tell you the truth, Sissie. But are you sure it would not be a trouble to you and Sir Percy?"

"Not the least trouble. It will be great fun to have all the excitement of a double wedding," cried Sissie, her eyes sparkling at the thought that, after all, she might be Sophie's bridesmaid, as Mr. Warren had suggested, when the suggestion had caused her so much pain.

"I think it would be a capital arrangement," said Walter. "Then do you em-

power me to make the offer to Mrs. Rice?"

"Yes, certainly. Or shall I come with you, and make it myself? I will just speak to papa first."

Sir Percy was quite willing to take the forlorn damsels in, and to act a father's part towards them, if necessary. Sissie had never been on terms of very close intimacy with any of the Rices, but now that they were in trouble she was anxious to do all she could for them; and she gave her invitation with such cordiality that there could be no hesitation in accepting it. Even Mrs. Rice thawed sufficiently to be almost affectionate as she bade Sissie "good-bye," after all the arrangements had been made for her daughters to remove to Monk's Own the next day.

The ensuing month was a very busy and a very happy time to Sissie. She was obliged for the present to lay aside all thoughts of the wronged heir. Edmund's letters grew

more and more satisfactory, and they generally contained some mention of Arnold, which she could interpret to her own satisfaction; for it was a strange thing that, although, when Arnold was present, the change in his manner made her doubt his love for her, when he was absent she had no such doubts, but had perfect faith in the constancy of an affection of which she had had so many undeniable proofs. Her guests made themselves very agreeable, and for Cara she soon began to entertain a cordial liking. The Bligh influence was already gaining the ascendancy over the low tone of thought and feeling which had done so much to ruin the naturally good dispositions of both the girls. With Sophie this had taken such deep root, that there seemed little hope of any great improvement in her, even if Mr. Warren had been the kind of man likely to elevate the character of his wife. But with Cara, Sissie was delighted to

think that Walter had every prospect of happiness.

A few days before that fixed for the double wedding, Sissie and Cara were in the picture-gallery together, when Sissie was startled by her guest asking, "Is there no portrait of Henry Monk?"

"No," she replied, as composedly as she could. "I believe he had some prejudice against having his portrait taken. Did you know him at all? But you could hardly remember him, if you did know him."

"Papa knew him very well. They were great friends. I just remember the fact of his once coming to our house, an ugly, swarthy-looking man, so very different to his brother Rupert. I asked about his portrait, because, in looking over some of papa's old letters the other day, I read one from Henry Monk, in which he says something about Beauty and the Beast, I

think in reference to some idea there was of his marrying a very beautiful girl."

"Did you notice where the letter was dated from?" asked Sissie.

"No. I only glanced through it in a very cursory manner; but if you have any curiosity about it, I can easily get you the letter. It is in the great box at the Hermitage, which I am going to finish packing up to-day."

"But would Mr. Rice like me to see it?"

"Oh, yes. There is nothing in the least of a private nature in any of the letters; he would not have left them about in this careless manner if there had been. I will bring it to you as soon as I can hunt it out again."

Two days later Cara fulfilled her promise, and Sissie read:

"DEAR DICK, "Leyden, June 3rd, 1832.

"Let me know as soon as you can what sort of girl Julia Colquhoun has turned out. Sir John writes that I am to marry

her. I have my reasons for not at present offending the Great Mogul, but I have still more cogent reasons for not obeying him in this matter. Fred Hughes and I have hit on a scheme—fit for the plot of a genteel comedy—by which we hope to cut this Gordian knot. His hopes in the matter, as you may imagine, are principally pecuniary, though he is to have the most telling of the two parts. Sir John expatiates on the beauty of the lady whom he destines for the Beast, but I only care to know whether she is cast in a firm or feeble mould, and whether there is any fear of her preferring grim night to rosy morn. Tell me this, Dick, post-haste, and we will cry 'quits' over our little score. Mum's the word, friend Richard, remember—or I will have my bond. And when I come a-courting the fair Julia, you will wish me all success, will you not?

"Yours, Dick, as you serve me,

"HAL."

Sissie was not at all of Cara Rice's opinion that this letter was of no private nature. Reading it by the light of what she had heard from Miss Colquhoun, she had little doubt that it contained the clue to all that was mysterious in Henry Monk's wooing at Kirklands. Although the marriage of which she had to find the evidence could not have taken place till after the date of this letter, Sissie thought it quite possible that some useful discovery might result from a visit to Leyden, which she accordingly resolved to undertake as soon as possible.

This "soon as possible," however, was yet a long way off. When the weddings were over, and Monk's Own had again settled down into its usual quiet, Sir Percy resolved on taking Sissie and Clement to Berkeley Square, for May and June, Mrs. Rupert Monk now undertaking the office of chaperone. Once in this London home, there was no chance that Sissie could get

away, without exciting more observation than was at all desirable. She therefore resigned herself with a good grace to all the social duties and so-called pleasures which crowded upon her, and called forth general admiration by her bright looks and gay spirits—so different to the anxious and abstracted manner which had been noticeable in her the previous year, when her mind had been full of the then fresh grief of Herbert's disappearance, and harassed by the unknown difficulties of the search she had undertaken.

Soon after they got to London, Sir Percy paid a visit of a few days to Cover-heath, but he was so satisfied with the success of the experiment for Edmund, that he would not have the boy home even for a day. At the beginning of July, however, when the young men had been more than three months in their solitude, he began to think that a change would be good for both of them, and

proposed to Arnold that they should accompany him in a walking tour through the midland and eastern counties. Arnold highly approved of the plan, as he fancied Edmund was devoting himself rather too earnestly to imaginative reveries, which now, at last, found expression in poetical effusions.

Sissie saw in this plan an excellent opportunity for her journey to Leyden. Clement was now particularly strong for him, and there could be no reason why he should not be her companion. So when Sir Percy began to arrange for their return to Monk's Own, she told him of her intention, and added that she thought it would be best for her and Clement to take up their abode at Cover-heath when the others began their excursion, as from thence they could start for Holland without exciting any remark.

"As you like," was Sir Percy's only comment. "All I can say is that it is all so

much trouble thrown away. But there is no reason why you and Clement should not see something of foreign lands—only I should have liked to take you abroad myself."

"I wish you would, papa, and help me to find out ——"

"Sissie! I have forbidden all mention of that most offensive subject," said Sir Percy, sternly.

Sissie had been once to Cover-heath during the previous spring, but she had been then so preoccupied, that the old scenes failed to make the impression upon her which she had fancied they would do. Now, however, it was quite different. The air seemed sweeter and purer than ever. The soft grey light which had always formed part of her recollections of the place, in its evening appearance, was resting upon it when she and her father walked through the quiet lanes from Bucksbridge, having sent Clement

on in the East Leighton fly with the servants.

As they reached the wide, straight road, which passed in front of the cottage grounds, two figures came in sight—a tall and a shorter one. Sissie knew who they were long before her father said, "Those must be Edmund and Arnold"—long before the young men raised their hats upon their sticks, and waved them in the air. In a few minutes rapid walking on both sides had brought the two parties together, and Sissie had noted the ruddy glow in Arnold's face.

"He does not now turn pale in shaking hands with me," she thought, with inward mortification, as the cold rigidity of her own face told her how pale she must be.

"Thank you for this," said Sir Percy, laying his left hand on Arnold's shoulder, as with the right he drew his son towards him, and looked into his altered countenance.

"Thank Cover-heath," returned Arnold, with a laugh. "We have both been very happy here; have we not, Edmund?"

"It has been like the old days, Sissie," said Edmund, turning to his sister a face which was just the face of those old days.

"And you have not found your task a hard one?" Sissie asked Arnold, as her father linked his arm into Edmund's, and the two walked on in front.

"Not in the least hard. Edmund is a most interesting companion. You must read some of his poetry—though he is very shy of showing it—and then you will judge if there can be any hardship in living with him."

"He is strangely altered in four months," observed Sissie. "I could fancy now that we had never left Cover-heath, and that he was a boy again. He has just the same expression now that he had as a boy."

"He is a boy—a child in many things—

as guileless, as trustful, and as reckless as a child of ten years old. But in others he soars quite out of my reach—into a world of his own, of which I know nothing and understand nothing, and where my eyes are dazzled by the brightness which is his necessary light."

"Do you think he really is a poet?"

"I do, indeed. Not that I am much of a judge of poetry."

"I want so much to hear something about Mr. and Mrs. Preston," said Sissie, after a short pause. "You never mention them in your letters to papa, and I have only once heard from Mrs. Preston since they left."

"They are well—very well, and very happy, they say. My father is quite contented with his present position—or, at any rate, he pretends to be so. I confess that *I* should be much more contented if I could see him once more master where he is

now a servant. I cannot help thinking that, however good a face he may put on it, the change must be galling to him at times, and more especially on my mother's account —not that she minds it, in the least."

"When we go back to Monk's Own, would you sometimes in your letters to papa give some news of them?" asked Sissie, timidly. "It is hard to be so cut off from those that one has known, and—and liked."

Arnold turned and looked in her face—with no shy loverlike glance, but with a straightforward expression of grateful satisfaction. "I am glad you like them," he said, "I cannot tell you how glad. There are not many persons who have it in them to appreciate such a man as my father."

"He has been very kind to me," said Sissie, "and, perhaps, I therefore know more of him than you think. He seems to me the most thoroughly unselfish man I ever met with."

"He is that," said Arnold, earnestly. "No one knows all that I owe to him—or the noble qualities which have been shown in his conduct towards me."

Sissie was strongly tempted to betray Mr. Preston's confidence to her, feeling as if to have a secret between them, which was unknown to others, would draw Arnold and herself more nearly together; but she resisted the impulse, and asked, "How do you like Cover-heath?"

"Exceedingly. I have been very happy here, and I should not have minded going on for a year in the same way, but I think Edmund wants a change. He is working his imagination a little too unmercifully."

"Do you ever have any visitors?"

"You know the Warrens were here for a few days? They entertained us, and we entertained them."

"And what did you think of them?"

Arnold laughed. "If Wilfred Bligh is not avenged, 'write me down ass.'"

"Why?"

"If I am not very much mistaken, Warren will turn out a thorough tyrant, and a jealous tyrant, too. Poor Sophie! I think she begins to suspect that her sin has found her out?"

"I remember some report of that sort about Mr. Warren when we lived here, but he was always so very mild when we saw him."

"Men generally are when it is to their interest not to appear in their true colours. Warren seems to have been very much struck with Sir Percy's kindness in having the weddings from Monk's Own. It was very kind."

"We enjoyed it all extremely," said Sissie. "And it was so nice to see how happy dear old Uncle Walter was at last."

"You think that is all right?"

"Yes. I was doubtful at first. But Cara improves very much on a closer acquaintance—and, also, I think, by intercourse with Walter."

"Happy the woman who gets such a husband! But happier still the man who can win for his wife a woman with whom all intercourse is improving!" As Arnold spoke earnestly thus, his voice shook for a moment, and a transient shade of deep emotion crossed his face. The next moment, however, he recovered himself, and was so perfectly collected during the rest of the time he and Sissie were together, that when the travellers had started the next day, Sissie told herself that she was no longer anything to Arnold, whilst he was more to her now than he had ever been.

CHAPTER X.

SISSIE had no time for sentimental musings, for as soon as she was left alone at Coverheath, she had to prepare for her visit to Holland. This was naturally a much more difficult undertaking than had been involved in any previous part of her search. The idea of going with no companion but her little brother and the old nurse, into a country of which she knew nothing of the language, and not much of the geography, was enough to daunt even Sissie's resolute spirit. However, a day spent in poring over the pages of a Continental 'Bradshaw' made her feel rather more familiar with the names and localities of the country she had

to explore, and she was as ready as Clement to enjoy the novelty of steamboat travelling when they started from St. Catherine's Wharf, four days after their father and his party had gone into Norfolk.

When they landed at Rotterdam, between six and seven the next morning, Sissie's first impression of Holland was not very encouraging. "Look, Sissie, the names over the shops look as if I had made all my alphabet into one word!" exclaimed Clement, as they walked through the streets to an inn, and Sissie thought the language she heard about her sounded like German, spoken with a mouth full of stones. Under these circumstances, she chose an inn of which she was assured that the landlord could speak English, and after she and Clement had rested and taken breakfast, she asked for an interview with the individual thus recommended. The result of this interview—which, in spite of the landlord's pro-

fessed linguistic attainments, was not so easily carried on as might have been expected—was that Sissie engaged a courier who could understand what she wished to say, and would be able to make her understand what others wished to say to her. Thus provided, the travellers proceeded to Leyden the same evening.

By the courier's advice, Sissie commenced operations with an examination of all the books in which travellers' names were inscribed at the various hotels; in vain, however. The next suggestion was, that as few English gentlemen would reside at Leyden, except for the advantages of the University, the books of that institution might probably give the required information. Here, again, there was nothing but disappointment. No one of the name of Monk appeared to have been a student at Leyden in or about the year 1832.

Sissie was at a loss where next to look for

any clue, when, in passing the shop of a dealer in artists' materials, it suddenly occurred to her that she had heard frequent mention of Henry Monk's talent for painting, and that he would most probably have cultivated that talent when he had the opportunity of studying the Dutch masters. She was the more confirmed in this supposition by her recollection of several copies of Dutch paintings in the Monk's Own gallery, which were catalogued as the work of this clever, but little valued member of the family. Full of these thoughts, Sissie turned into the shop, and, with the help of her interpreter, entered into conversation with the colourman.

Yes, he was living here in 1832, and for some years before that. Had had many English customers,—students at the University, and others. Did not remember the name of Monk, but would look in his books. Looked in his books, and did not find the name. Perhaps

the gentleman had paid ready money; some did, and some did not, and some didn't pay at all; the students were apt to be forgetful, especially foreigners. Seemed to have some recollection of a young gentleman answering to that description, but could not recall his name. Was sure that it was not Monk, because he should not have forgotten that name. Thought it was some such name as Lorenz, or Moritz. But if the gentleman was a painter, he would have frequented the galleries at the Hague and Amsterdam, and might be heard of in one of those places.

As there seemed nothing more to be done at Leyden, where Sissie had now been three days, she took the colourman's hint, and went to the Hague. Here she and Clement passed a quiet Sunday, and as the courier had some affairs of his own to transact at his home, he paid a visit to Rotterdam, and Sissie commissioned him to inspect the

hotel books there, before his return on Monday evening. During the absence of her interpreter, she made inquiries at the English church and at the British Legation. In neither place had she, at first, much success. The English chaplain was away, and his substitute, who examined the registers for 1833, could find no name of Monk inscribed in them. The same evening, however, Sissie received a note from one of the secretaries of the Legation, introducing a friend, who might be able to give her the required information. The Mr. Johnston thus introduced had been a student at the University of Utrecht in the year 1831, and remembered a fellow-student of the name of Monk, who answered to the description given by Sissie of the relative of whom she was in search. The courier returning that night from Rotterdam, without any good news, Sissie resolved to start the next day for Utrecht.

The University registers here were not more satisfactory than those of Leyden; but finding the name of Abbot in constant proximity to that of Johnston, Sissie had little doubt that the memory of her new acquaintance had got confused between the two ecclesiastical titles. The hotel-registers being equally unsatisfactory, she then turned her attention to Amsterdam. After the usual preliminary researches at the hotels, the British Consulate, and the English and Scotch churches—all in vain—an apparently likely clue was given her in a music-seller's shop, where the name of Monch occurred constantly on the books, from 1830 to 1836. The shopkeeper and his wife both describing this Monch as a tall dark foreigner, Sissie felt certain that she was now at last on the right track, and she followed this track from Amsterdam to Dordrecht, from Dordrecht to Arnheim, from Arnheim to Rotterdam, from Rotterdam to Antwerp, from Antwerp to

Ostend, and from Ostend back to the Hague, where she had the satisfaction of discovering that she had been in pursuit of a Spanish strolling singer of the name of Moncha.

The good-natured courier, who had entered into the quest with keen interest, was so concerned at Sissie's disappointment, that he urged upon her to take a little holiday, and to spend a few days at Schleveningen, which he said every stranger ought to visit. Sissie was all the more ready to take the friendly advice, as Clement did not seem well, and she feared that he was feeling the bad effects of the effluvia from the canals, which was becoming very unpleasant. She determined, therefore, to establish her head-quarters at Schleveningen, and take daily journeys from thence to wherever her search might lead her.

After a few days' rest from her hitherto dispiriting labours, Sissie felt quite restored,

and ready to renew the work. Leaving Clement in Phœbe's charge, and recommending them both to the care of a friendly Dutch lady who spoke English, she was starting with the intention of following up a possible, but not very promising clue in Rotterdam, when, as she passed out of the hotel, the landlady asked if she would inscribe her name in the visitors' book, which the courier had already examined. As Sissie wrote her name, her attention was attracted by some amusing observations of facetious English travellers, and thinking that they might please Clement, she asked leave to borrow the book for the day. When she returned in the evening—having completely failed in her object—Clement had discovered other entertaining entries in the travellers' book, and pointed to one, the handwriting of which made his sister's heart leap with excitement. There was no mistaking that irregular scrawl. It was the

writing of the scrap of letter which first impelled Sissie to this search, and of the signature which had been attached to Clement's coveted seal.

"What does that mean, Sissie?" asked the boy. "What is ambrosia?"

Sissie read in the list of names, "Henry and Marie Moritz." Under the headings of, whence from, and where to: "From Paradise to the Seventh Heaven." Under the observations: "Ambrosia and nectar are the viands provided at this establishment." The date of the entry was March 15th, 1832.

The landlady, when appealed to, could afford no information as to these travellers, having only been at Schleveningen for ten years. She, however, was able to give the address at Amsterdam of the former proprietor, and Sissie was fain to be contented with that for the present. In thinking over what she had discovered, she became more

and more assured that it was a most important discovery, and that Henry Monk, for some reasons of his own, must have travelled under the assumed surname of Maurice, his second Christian name. With this assurance came a suspicion—which Sissie was almost ashamed to feel as a hope —that the secret marriage might, after all, not have been a legal one. The wife was evidently his companion at Schleveningen; but the assumed name seemed very much as if the wife had been the victim of some deception. Just as Sissie was pondering on all this, the landlady returned to say that she had just remembered that a married daughter of the former master of the hotel lived in Schleveningen, and that, if Sissie wished it, she would at once send for this person. Sissie, however, preferred going herself, accompanied by her faithful interpreter. The result of this visit was quite confirmatory of the belief that Henry Moritz

was Henry Monk. The good *vrow*, who had been a young girl in 1832, perfectly remembered the gentleman who had written those words in the travellers' book. She had learnt a little English of a young man who was valet to an Englishman staying for some months at Schleveningen, and she always afterwards made a point of reading all the observations written in English by the visitors. She was also interested by the appearance of the young couple, who were evidently just married—in fact, the bride had told her so when she gave her some little help in her toilette. They seemed very happy, and very fond of each other. He was perfectly handsome, tall, and very dark, with eyes like flaming fires, and she was a pretty, little, fair, delicate thing, who looked as if a breath might carry her away. William Brown—that was her English friend—said that the gentleman was English, but the two always spoke

together in German. The gentleman could speak good Dutch. They had not stayed more than a week, and they had gone back to the Hague, from whence they had come. The gentleman's luggage, however, had many railway labels for Leyden sticking upon it, as if he had often been to Leyden.

This last piece of intelligence recalled to Sissie's mind the remarks of the colourman at Leyden about the young artist of the name of Moritz, and the next day she started for Leyden. The colourman had found a painting by this Moritz, which he had had to sell, but had never sold, and on which was inscribed, in the scrawl now so well known to Sissie, "Henry Maurice M." After long rummaging amongst old papers, the shopkeeper also found a note from this customer, with an address, to which Sissie immediately repaired. Here she soon succeeded in recalling to the mind of the

mistress of the establishment the tall, dark Englishman who had boarded with her in 1832; and, almost as quickly, elicited the information that he had left her house to be married to a young lady living at the Hague. Whilst Sissie returned to Clèment, the courier again examined the books of Leyden University, and found that Henry Moritz had been a student there from September, 1830, till March, 1832.

The next day Sissie started very early for the Hague, went again to the British Legation, and from thence was referred to the *Stadhuis*, where she was not long in finding the register of the marriage of Henry Maurice Monk to Marie Blüm. Another visit to the English chaplain, and a reference to earlier registers than those previously consulted, proved that the wedding had taken place in the English church, where the names were inscribed in the same manner as in the register of the civil con-

tract. There could be no doubt of the legality of the marriage.

Having got thus far, Sissie felt quite uncertain what steps to take now, with a view to tracing the after lives of the young couple. The chaplain, however, suggested to her that to discover the principal witness —whose name was Wilhelmina Vanderkerk —might lead to some news of the bride, of whom this witness was probably the intimate friend.

Three days spent in this fresh search put Sissie in possession of the following facts. Wilhelmina Vanderkerk was the only daughter of a former inhabitant of the Hague, who had lived for some years, and died at Heidelberg. After his death, his widow and child had returned to their native place, bringing with them a young German lady—Marie Blüm. None of Sissie's informants knew anything of this young lady's history subsequent to her

marriage; but she learnt that Mrs. Vanderkerk had died in 1835, and soon afterwards her daughter had gone as governess to a family in Rotterdam.

Some members of this family being hunted out, after a few days, by the indefatigable courier, Sissie got the information that their former governess had married a German of the name of Pfeffer, with whom she had gone to the West Indies. This appeared a terrible check to any further discovery; but Sissie accidentally learnt that Herr Pfeffer had come from the Bâle University, and to Bâle, therefore, she at once proceeded, having parted from her invaluable courier with many expressions of goodwill on both sides.

When Sissie reached Bâle she found herself unexpectedly near a successful termination to this part of her search. In making inquiries amongst the professors about their former colleague, she lighted upon an in-

timate friend of Herr Pfeffer, who immediately informed her that he and his wife were then living at Heidelberg. To return to Heidelberg without delay was, of course, the next step to take.

CHAPTER XI.

HAVING reached Heidelberg, Sissie had little further difficulty in finding Professor Pfeffer, and still less in identifying as the Dutch Wilhelmina, the tall, fair, placid woman whom he addressed as "Minchen."

"I think I am right at last!" cried Sissie, almost involuntarily, as the couple both looked a polite inquiry as to her business. "I believe you once knew a young lady named Marie Blüm?"

"Ah, surely! Do you give me news of my dear Marie?"

"No; I am sorry to say that I have come to you for news of her."

"Alas, my good miss! I have not heard from her since many years. Then what news can *I* give to you?"

"If I explain my reasons for making these inquiries, madam, you will be better able to judge whether or not you can help me," answered Sissie.

During this little dialogue Herr Pfeffer had been looking from one to the other o the speakers with an expression of helpless curiosity. His wife, whose English was good, though evidently only acquired from books, now explained to him in German what had passed, and then turned to Sissie with a smile of courteous attention.

Sissie felt that here there could be no risk in the most perfect openness; so, speaking in her imperfect German, that the master of the house might not be shut out of the conversation, she began:

"Henry Maurice Monk, whom, I believe, you knew as Henry Maurice only, was a re-

lation of mine; and I am exceedingly anxious to discover his widow and child, if, as I have reason to think, he had a child."

"Certainly, that is certain! My Marie wrote to me many times of her little boy!"

"That is just what I wanted to know from you!" cried Sissie. "If you should happen to have kept any of her letters it would be a great help to me."

"Ah, yes, that I have kept her letters, that is not to be doubted! I will fetch them."

"Did you know Marie Blüm?" asked Sissie of Herr Pfeffer, when his wife had left the room, and got in return a long explanation, which, her knowledge of spoken German being very defective, soon threw her into a condition of the most complete bewilderment; and she answered so much at random that, when Madame Pfeffer returned, the good-natured professor thought it advisable to leave the ladies to finish their talk in

English, and offered to take Clement to see the great "Tun."

"Here are the letters. They are all in German, though you know, I suppose, that I am a Dutch woman. Marie only learnt very little of my language when she was with me. We had lived in Germany so long that I could speak German with ease."

"Had you known Marie Blüm long?" asked Sissie.

"Not very long time. It was here, at Heidelberg. I was living with my parents, and one summer, it will now be twenty-four —twenty-five years since, we had gone to the baths at Wiesbaden, for a little change and for my dear father's health. And at Wiesbaden Marie and I have made acquaintance. She was there with her father, who was very, very ill; and besides him she had no one in the world. We became to each other very dear, and when Herr Blüm died, Marie would not any way separate herself

from me. She grieved to break her heart for her father, and my dear mother felt herself so moved towards the poor orphan, that she took her for her own daughter. Perhaps I have not right to say that, though," the honest Dutchwoman suddenly put in, with a blush on her fair, smooth face, "for Marie was rich and we were very poor, so she paid us with liberality for her board."

"She lived with you then?" said Sissie, longing to look at the letters, but not wishing to interrupt the narrative.

"Yes, she came back with us here to Heidelberg; and when, a few months after, my dear father died, she went with us back to our own country, where we had relatives."

"And there she met Henry Monk—Maurice?"

"How they first became acquainted, that I forget; but that it was not long after we returned to s'Gravenhagen—Hague, you say—of that I am certain."

"What was Mr. Maurice like?" asked Sissie."

"Was he liked? That I do not know. He had not many friends. For myself, I did not hold much on him, and my mother still less. But Marie, he was her heart's treasure; she would willingly to the world's end with him have gone."

"And what sort of looking man was he?"

"How he looked. He was very black and meagre, what you call lean. He had great black eyes, that seemed as though they would burn up one's soul. But he had a so soft, sweet voice, that when he had set his heart on anything, he must only speak, and no one could refuse him."

"You were at their marriage, I think," said Sissie.

"Ah, yes, indeed I was. My poor little Marie! I was very sad to lose her. And she grieved at parting, but she was glad to go with her beloved to his own land."

"Did they go to England directly they were married?"

"First they went on a journey in Belgium, and, I think, in Switzerland. I know that they visited Wiesbaden, and the grave of Marie's father, for Marie's first letter came to me from thence. Here it is; will you see it?"

The letter, translated into English, was as follows:—

"Wiesbaden, April 4th.

"MY EVER-LOVED LITTLE SISTER,

"Have you scolded—no, not scolded, for you never do that—have you grieved very much that I have been so long in writing to you? I am ashamed to think how long—nearly three weeks. But those three weeks have flown like three days, or three hours, or, I could almost say, three minutes. Oh, Mina, you do not know how charming my dear husband is! No one but I can know it, for he says that to no one

else has he ever been himself. Do you remember that you used to say he was selfish and exacting. Well, my Minchen, you are quite wrong: he is so thoughtful and tender of me that he does not care enough for himself; he only seems to live to make my life perfect. When we visited together my father's grave, he spoke so sadly about never having known a father's love, that I felt as if my heart would break for pity. He said that he was worse than an orphan. He very seldom talks about his family or his early life, and I did not like then to ask what he meant, as I thought it might be something of which he would not like to speak. At any rate, I can now be father and mother, and brothers and sisters to him. He says so, and I quite believe it, for I think he loves me almost as much as I love him.

"This well-remembered place speaks to me at every turn of my dear, kind, second mother, and of you, my much-loved little

sister. It is strange to think with what a heavy, desolate heart I left Wiesbaden, not yet two years ago, and with what happy feelings I have now returned to it. If my dearest father sees me now, do you think it can grieve him to know that I can be so happy without him? No, it cannot grieve him, for he desired my happiness above everything in the world, as I know you do, my unselfish sister-friend.

"My husband—does not that look old and matronly for little Marie to write?—my husband sends his most heartfelt greetings to his mother and sister, and with my deepest love and gratitude, I remain,

"My sweetest little sister,

"Your ever loving

"MARIE MORITZ."

"What a nice letter," said Sissie, as she returned the yellow, time-worn paper to Madame Pfeffer.

"It was four months before I again heard. This is the letter. You will see it came from England."

"London, August 25th.

"MY DEAREST MINA,

"You will see that your little sister is now in this great, ugly, noisy, dirty city. If I had not my most precious husband with me, it would tear my heart to see the sights I see here, and not to have one friendly face to smile at me. But, happily, my Henry says that we shall not stay here many more days. He is going to take me to a very pretty place, where I shall be so happy. We had to come to England all in a moment, about some business which called for my husband, and soon he will have to leave me, but not for long. We are still all the world to one another, just as much as we were in those dear, happy days under the trees in the *Bosch*. I am trying not to forget the few Dutch words I learnt, but I am afraid

that I shall, for I am getting so English that I care for no other language. Henry says that I shall soon speak like a native.

"I cannot write any more now, for the noise in the street makes my head ache, and I am very tired. I will send you another letter very soon, when I get to my pretty country home. Give my dear little mother a thousand kisses for me, and take two thousand yourself, my dearest friend.

"Believe me ever, your loving

"MARIE MORRIS.

"Henry says I am to spell my name so, and not 'Moritz,' as I used, because in England the tradespeople and servants would not know what to make of the old name, and he wants me to be quite an Englishwoman."

As Sissie finished reading this letter, Madame Pfeffer gave her another, without speaking.

"Clifton, January 20th.

"Rejoice with me, my much-loved friends! I am the mother of the sweetest little boy you ever saw. I only wish that you could see him, my own mother-friend! He is now sleeping in his cot by my side, and one dear little pink hand is grasping the blanket, oh, so firmly! My boy will grow up a man of a fine spirit; his father says so, and I am sure of it. Oh, I am so happy! I must quite forget that I am a foreigner, now that I have to train this little Englishman, and I must learn to speak good English, that I may not teach him wrong. Indeed, I think I am getting on very fast; already my own language comes strangely to me. But I will keep enough of it to talk to you, my dearest friends, when you come, as you must soon, to see my boy.

"My husband had to be away from me for a long time before my boy was born, but now he will never leave me again—his tire-

some business is all settled. I hear him coming in now, and I have got all sorts of beauties to show him in our treasure, so I cannot write more now.

"Ever, dearest people,

"Your most loving

"MARIECHEN."

"This next letter alludes to the death of my dear mother," said Madame Pfeffer, and Sissie read:—

"MY MOST-BELOVED SISTER-FRIEND,

"What can I say to you? What words of mine can give you any comfort under your great grief? Only believe, dearest Minchen, that I sorrow with you. I have lost the only mother *I* ever knew, and the tenderest and kindest mother that was ever known. And I had hoped so that she would see my boy! But I must not write of self now. Come to me, my friend, and we will weep together; and my Henry and I, and

my little boy, will try if we cannot cheer you up again. Come to us, Minchen.

"Ever your loving friend,

"MARIE MORRIS."

"I could not go to her," said Madame Pfeffer, "for I was very ill during many months. When I recovered I must work for my living, and I went as governess to a family at Rotterdam. I had occasionally letters from Marie, but I have lost all but this one more. I was then going to be married to Professor Pfeffer, whom we had known as we lived at Heidelberg."

"Clifton, June, 1837.

"MY BELOVED FRIEND.

"At last I hear bright news from you, and I may hope that your troubles are at an end, and that you are going to be very happy with your good professor. I only grieve to hear that you must take so long a voyage,

and be away, perhaps, for years. When shall we ever meet again, my little sister? Would you know me now, I wonder. My Harry tells me that I might be taken for an Englishwoman, and that is well, for my little Englishman ought to have an English mother; and, perhaps, before long, but I will not say, it is not well to look forward with too much confidence. My darling husband is more precious to me than ever. I still love him better than I love my boy, and all that I most desire is that our 'sunbeam' should grow like his father. He is not like him now, though Harry says that he is like some of his family. He still speaks very rarely of his family. I do not know whether he has any relatives alive or not; nor do I care, for we are all in all to one another; and as I have not enriched my husband by any kindred, I think I should feel ashamed if he had any to bestow on me. He tells me that our boy, and his brothers

and sisters, if they should come, will have enough to live on, and that is all I mind about. Harry went to my old home, and settled my affairs there, and now my little property is safe in the English Funds. Our cottage is very pretty, and when my beautiful boy is playing on the grass plot, it looks prettier still. I should have nothing left to wish for, if only I could have you here to see my happiness with your own eyes, my loving, beloved sister-friend."

"Ever your faithful

"MARIECHEN."

"I have never heard from her since that," said Madame Pfeffer, sadly, as Sissie finished this last letter, "I married soon after, and went with my husband to the West Indies. When I came back, after three years, I have written in vain, once, twice, to Marie. I have had no answer, and I have lost all hope ever to see her more. And you can give me

none?" asked the good woman, with tears in her eyes.

"None, unfortunately. I knew nothing of my cousin's wife. In fact, his marriage was concealed from his family."

"He had not need to be ashamed of my Marie. She was fit to marry with a prince."

"I believe," said Sissie, with some hesitation, "that his father had a great prejudice against—had a great desire that his son should marry an Englishwoman; and that was why the son concealed his marriage."

"Then his father was alive, whilst he pretended no relatives to have! That would no honest man have done!" cried the Germanised Dutchwoman, her excitement making strange havoc with her English.

"I am afraid he was not quite straightforward in everything," returned Sissie. "But he seems to have truly loved his wife."

"And you know not where she is?"

"I only know that Henry Monk died in

1837, and that a lady was with him then. But I have been searching in vain for some time to find his wife and child. I did not know, however, that he had lived under a false name."

"A false name! Then was not the marriage good?"

"Yes. For he was married in his own name. I am surprised you did not notice it when you signed the register."

"I noticed nothing. I dare say I was thinking but of Marie, and of how we should miss her dear face when she should be no longer with us."

"I think I have every hope now of being able to trace her," said Sissie. "I know now where to search, and for what name to search. There can be no doubt of my success. Did she never give you any fuller address than Clifton? How could you direct your letters to her?"

"I did not direct my letters to Clifton. I sent them to her husband, somewhere in

London. I think it was to some club, you call it."

"I dare say Clifton will be enough address for my purpose," said Sissie.

"And you will write me what you learn, my dear miss. You will give me news of my Marie?"

"Certainly, I will write to you directly I have any news later than you have had. Well, Clement, have you thanked Herr Pfeffer for his kindness to you?"

"Yes, Sissie—only—need I go anywhere else now? My head aches so, and I can't make him understand, and he wants to take me——"

"Your head aches, my child!" cried the warm-hearted Wilhelmina. "Come and lie down upon this sofa; see, I will close the curtains; you shall be quite quiet. He will find himself better after a while, my dear. I will tell the professor what the poor child ails."

Herr Pfeffer was as much concerned as his

wife when he understood that Clement had been trotting about after him with an aching head and aching limbs; and they would neither of them hear of their new acquaintances returning to the inn, but insisted on sending for their luggage, and making them quite at home in their own house.

Sissie had soon resolved to make her way to Clifton as rapidly as she could, but for a week Clement was too unwell to travel; and when the feverish attack seemed to have passed off, he was so weak that it was necessary to get him home with as little fatigue as possible. The Rhine, therefore, was chosen in preference to the railway; and the good professor and his wife accompanied the travellers to Mannheim, where they all remained one night. The next day Sissie and Clement started in the steamboat for Mayence, with many kind wishes from their late host and hostess, and a basket full of delicacies for the invalid.

CHAPTER XII.

CLEMENT had borne the three hours' journey from Mannheim so well, and seemed to find such enjoyment in lying on the deck in the bright sun, that Sissie and Phœbe agreed that they might venture on a little more steamboat travelling on the following day, and therefore decided to make Coblentz the next sleeping-place. As Clement was always strongest in the early morning, they started by the first boat, with the intention of resting at St. Goar for two hours during the heat of the day, and proceeding by a later steamer to Coblentz.

The morning was extremely hot, the boat was overcrowded, it being a student's holi-

day, and Sissie soon saw that Clement was feeling much more fatigue than he had felt the previous day. She had been recommended to the good offices of much-vaunted innkeepers at all the principal towns on the Rhine; but at any of the smaller places she would have been at a loss to find an inn where she might be sure of comfortable quarters for her little brother. Clement, however, became rapidly so much worse, that soon after leaving Bingen, she resolved, at all hazards, to land as soon as possible. When the next stoppage occurred, and a boat with some passengers in it came out to the steamer, Clement had fallen asleep on Phœbe's shoulder, and Sissie did not like to rouse him. He awoke in about twenty minutes, just after another stoppage, and began to complain bitterly of the pain in his head and back. Sissie, in great distress, sought out the captain, and telling him of her trouble, asked if he could recommend her

to a quiet inn at the next landing-place. The captain named an inn, and then Sissie asked, with some timidity, for she felt that the question might not be a palatable one, whether there were any chance of her finding an English doctor. The captain looked rather as if he thought her out of her mind, but a young German who stood near, one of the countless Bonn and Heidelberg students, at once volunteered the information that, although there might be no English doctor at Caub, he had half an hour since parted at Lorch with an English medical student, who had just got his diploma in the University of Bonn.

"Look here," added the young man, very energetically, speaking in German to the captain. "You send word by this boat," pointing to a companion steamer slowly going up stream, "that Mr. Paterson, at the Schwann at Lorch, is to come on by the next boat to Caub—to a patient. Now

then," he continued, turning to Sissie, whilst the captain obeyed his directions. "You land here, and the doctor will be with you in little more than an hour. You may depend upon his skill, I assure you. Can I help your invalid into the boat?" he added, as the steamer stopped to let the few passengers get out."

Having almost carried Clement into the smaller boat, the young man took his seat by Sissie's side, saying, "I have only to go on by the next steamer. It will be no loss to me, and I should like to see you comfortably settled."

As they rowed to shore, the good-natured student chattered incessantly, telling Sissie what a fine week's holiday he had had in celebration of Paterson—his "great chum," an English schoolboy would have said, but the German lad called him his "heart's-brother"—having taken his doctor's degree. Paterson had stood treat, and they had

been to Heidelberg, and to Weisbaden, from whence they had walked to Lorch. At Weisbaden they had fallen in with another Englishman, with whom Paterson had struck up a great friendship, and he had joined in their walk. They had all intended to go on to Bonn at once, but the two Englishmen had been so knocked up by the heat, that they had preferred stopping at Lorch, which he should have done also, had not he been obliged to reach Bonn that night.

"And we have delayed you!" cried Sissie.

"Oh, no, not at all. The steamer that brings Paterson will take me on in plenty of time."

Having seen Clement in bed in the best room of the little inn, and specially commended the young travellers and their old servant to the care of the sympathetic landlady, the German student went on his way. About half an hour later Sissie heard voices

in the passage—one voice which made her heart beat wildly and her temples throb; but when the servant came in to say that the English doctor had arrived, she blushed at the foolish freak her imagination had played her.

The newly-made doctor was a quiet, sensible-looking young man, who entered upon the duties of his novel position with a mixture of modesty and confidence, which greatly reassured Sissie's mind. He told her that in the course of his professional education he had had great experience of low fevers similar to that from which Clement was suffering, and which doubtless had been brought on by the bad state of the Dutch canals at that season of the year. When his visit was paid, and his offer to sit up with the patient had been gratefully refused, Dr. Paterson took his leave, promising to come early the next morning. It was certainly not the young doctor's voice which

once again that evening made Sissie start up and listen, whilst her eagerness prevented her from hearing anything but the blood surging through her veins.

The next day Clement was in much the same state, not alarmingly ill, but with sufficient fever to be a severe trial to a constitution so delicate as his. Under Dr. Paterson's orders he was carried to a lodging near, where he would be more quiet than at the inn, and the doctor expressed his intention of staying at Caub until his patient decidedly changed for the better; declaring that this would be no inconvenience to him, as his friend, who was obliged to leave that day, would stop at Bonn, and transact some necessary business there for him.

About an hour later, as Sissie was leaving the inn, to which she had returned for a cake to which Clement had taken a fancy, she came upon the doctor and his friend standing in the doorway. Their backs were towards

her, and just as she was about to pass them she was suddenly arrested by the same voice which had so agitated her yesterday, and of which the tones, when heard so close, could not be mistaken. At the same moment the speaker turned to let her pass him, and exclaimed, in no less astonishment than her own, "Sissie! Miss Monk! *You* here!"

"Steamboat in sight, sir," said the porter who was engaged to carry Arnold's luggage.

"I am not going, I have changed my mind," returned the young man. "You will let me stay with you, Sissie?" he asked eagerly, though in very low tones.

"Let you stay!" repeated Sissie. "Just think what it must be to me to see a friend's face in this strange land, and with poor little Clement so ill, and old Phœbe so utterly helpless."

"Now we may say, 'How do you do?'" said Arnold, and he took Sissie's hand and held it in a manner quite different from that

which had so lately convinced Sissie that she was no longer anything to him. "But Clement is not *very* ill, Dr. Paterson says. Let me come and see him," he added, after a short pause, during which each had probably wondered how the other could possibly have got there.

"I thought you were in Norfolk with papa and Edmund," remarked Sissie, as she led the way to the cottage where Clement was.

"I thought you were at Cover-heath," retorted Arnold, laughing.

"Papa knew I was not there," returned Sissie, gravely. "He knew that Clement and I were obliged to pay a visit at Heidelberg."

"But you have been in Holland," Arnold said quickly, and Sissie thought rather suspiciously.

"Yes, we have been to Leyden and the Hague," she answered.

"I also have been at the Hague; and I

have been to Meyringen, where my mother lived as a girl; and since then I have been to Wiesbaden, and who do you think I saw there, by-the-bye? Mr. Rice and Stephen, both were at the gaming tables, and both looked very much as if they spent most of their time there. But to explain my proceedings. Whilst I was with your father in Norfolk I learned something which necessitated a visit to Switzerland, to see after my mother's family affairs, and Sir Percy very kindly gave me a month's leave of absence. So I am making the best use I can of it. It is nearly up now, however. My poor little man, what is all this?" Arnold added, as he walked into Clement's room, and seated himself on the bed.

Sissie went out to make some necessary purchases, feeling very much as if this were all a dream, from which she should awaken to find herself alone with a sick child and an ignorant old woman in a foreign country.

When she got back to the cottage, however, things were more dream-like than ever. Arnold met her at the door, saying, "Will you come for a walk, Sissie? Clement is asleep, and Paterson has told me to take you out, that he may not have two patients on his hands instead of one."

"Arnold, ought I to keep Dr. Paterson here? It is too much kindness to ask from a stranger."

"He says he is very glad to be of use. He is a good fellow, and so is his friend."

"The friend who was so kind to us, do you mean?" asked Sissie. "Did you ever hear of such kindness from two utter strangers?"

"I am not much surprised," said Arnold, fixing on her the look which she had formerly been used to meet with such utter indifference, but which now threw her into the strangest confusion. His observation of this confusion appeared satisfactory to

Arnold, for before she had recovered herself he offered her his arm. Sissie laid her trembling hand upon it, the first time her hand had so lain, except for dancing. Arnold must have thought of this, for he suddenly asked, "Do you remember the ball at Kirklands on my twenty-first birthday? Only a year and a half ago, and it seems like centuries! How smooth my life was before then, and since then it has been all ups and downs! It is in an up now; I hope the down may not be coming!"

"Why is it," said Sissie, making her voice as unmoved and steady as she could, "that you are to our family like the good fairy in story-books, and always appear on the scene when we are in need of help?"

"Shall I tell you why, Sissie?"

"Can you?" asked Sissie, glancing shyly into his face, but dropping her eyes at once before the gaze they encountered.

"Because," answered Arnold, in a half-

joking tone, but with deep feeling in his trembling voice, "my life is so bound up in you and yours, that there is a kind of electric wire which passes from you into the very centre of my heart, and when anything troubles you, a message flies to me along that wire, and brings me to your side."

"Not always to *my* side," said Sissie, trying to laugh.

"To the side of any one who is dear to you." There was a long silence, whilst Arnold was trying in vain to meet Sissie's averted eyes. "Sissie," he exclaimed at last, "why are you so changed from what you used to be? You will never look at me now. I used to draw life out of those grey depths—so like the morning sky before the sun has risen—but now they are always hidden from me; I cannot get beyond the drooping lashes."

"How poetical you have become," said Sissie, desperately trying to ward off the sen-

timental tone which would mix with their talk. "Have you learnt it of Edmund?"

"For the last two years I have had a teacher whose lessons are winged and very sharply pointed, and what *he* teaches can never be forgotten. Do you know who my teacher is, Sissie? Will you guess?"

"No, I never guess."

"Is it unfair of me to talk to you like this, now that I have got you at my mercy?" asked Arnold, suddenly. "I think it is. You do not know what prompts me, and you must think me a mean-spirited rascal. I forgot that, Sissie. I think the unexpected sight of you has turned my head. Let's go back to Clement."

That night Arnold insisted upon coming in to sit up with Clement, and the next night also, Phœbe being quite worn out with the fatigue and worry of the last few weeks. He did not again ask Sissie to walk with him, and they were only together

occasionally in Clement's room, or when Dr. Paterson was present. The sick boy grew very irritable as his fever subsided, and taking a fancy to Arnold's nursing, he refused to be attended by any one else. Sissie remonstrated in vain, when night after night Arnold was kept up, and day after day was not allowed any rest. The young man himself laughed at her scruples, accused her of being jealous of his influence, and at last, with the doctor's help, succeeded in excluding her from the sick room, which he and Phœbe monopolized.

Sissie had written to her father as soon as she found Clement was too ill to travel home, and she half expected that he would come to them; but more than a week passed and she heard nothing from him.

In ten days after they reached Caub, Dr. Paterson pronounced that Clement was well enough to continue his journey, and the party proceeded to Coblentz—Arnold

going on by an earlier boat, to get rooms comfortably prepared for the invalid, who followed under the doctor's care. The next day, however, when Sissie expected that the same plan would be pursued, Arnold announced that he had sent a message on to Cologne. "For," he added, "I might do Paterson some bodily injury if for another day I were to envy him as I envied him all yesterday."

The four made a happy and interesting group on the deck of the steamer, which was not so crowded as the previous day's boat had been. The delicate-looking boy lay stretched across Arnold's knees, with his fair head resting on the shoulder of the bronzed, vigorous-looking young man, who, in spite of his exuberant vitality, might have been taken for his brother, from the likeness between them in eyes and hair; Sissie, who sat on a stool by Clement's feet, which were lying in her lap, was of quite a different

type; and the young doctor, who was a Scotchman, and had all the personal characteristics generally attributed to his nation, was equally unlike the other three. The old nurse sat a little apart from this group, but her anxious and protecting glances showed that she belonged to the same party.

Neither of the four spoke much. Dr. Paterson was naturally silent. Clement was too weak to talk, and the others were too happy. Sissie felt as if a word might break the spell, and scatter all the sweet, hopeful fancies which were conjured up by Arnold's face, and by the events of the last few weeks. She had been a little mortified at the studied neglect and avoidance with which Arnold had treated her since the day of their unexpected meeting at Caub; but there was something in his manner now, and perhaps more in the calm influences of the weather, the scenery, and the mode of travelling, which lulled all doubts to rest,

and made her confident that, the heir once found—and a week would surely now suffice for that—nothing could longer separate herself and Arnold.

She was roused from her reverie by Dr. Paterson, who said, "You have often sympathised in the sorrows and the constancy of Ritter Toggenburg, I dare say, Miss Monk. There is the scene of his long watch."

Sissie looked at the island, and felt that Arnold was looking at *her*.

"Ritter, treue Schwesterliebe widmet euch dies Herz:
Fordert keine andere Liebe, denn es macht mir Schmertz,"*

he quoted, in a low voice. Then with sudden vehemence added, "Poor fellow! No wonder he went and sought for a violent death. Better a thousand times to get hatred than that cold sister's-love which freezes all the hope out of one's life!"

* Knight, a faithful sister's love this heart devotes to thee;
Ask for no other love, for it gives me pain.

Dr. Paterson calmly pursued the abstract question, whilst Sissie was trembling under the personal application which had been given to it. "I don't agree with you that the knight sought for death in the Holy Land. I think what he sought was forgetfulness."

"Then he chose the very worst place to find it!" exclaimed Arnold. "A life of noble excitement—as his must have been when his name frightened the Mussulman—is the most hopelessly ineffectual cure for a too-present memory. All excitement—the excitement that comes from great deeds—must have an object, whether religion, love, or ambition; and the great deeds only serve to strengthen devotion to the object which first prompted them. Don't you think so?" Arnold turned his flashing eyes upon Sissie in time to catch sight of *her* eyes fixed upon him with an expression which made him, with a start of joyful surprise, involuntarily

edge himself a little nearer to her, and kept him silent whilst Dr. Paterson took the answer upon himself.

"I think you are quite right in a general way. But in this case there could have been no object—for the lady was not to be won."

"Oh, you canny Scot!" cried Arnold, laughing—but with a forced laugh, which told of some deeper feeling beneath the careless words. "Do you think there can be no object unless there is something to be gained? Do you think that to prove himself worthy of the love he could not win was not object enough for a true knight?"

"It is a long time since I read the ballad," remarked Sissie, feeling as if she must make some remark, "but I don't think I was ever quite clear whether or not the lady did get to love the knight during his absence, and took the veil in despair of his return?"

"*Could* she have done that, Sissie, after that horrid 'sister's-love?'" asked Arnold, in a very low voice, suddenly stooping forward, much to Clement's discomfort.

Sissie knew that his eyes were imploring hers to meet them, but she would not look up. She only answered, in the same low tone in which Arnold had spoken, "I believe she could."

Dr. Paterson's imperturbable voice went on. "Then if he sought death in going to the wars, what did he seek in returning?"

"Life," answered Arnold, excitedly. "Death would not come at his wish, but life without her was a worse kind of death; so he exchanged his death in life for an existence where his daily glimpse of her put life into death; for his whole long watch of her window was as much death as the end of it, when he sat there a corpse. I am not defending his conduct, mind," Arnold added, more composedly. "I have always had a

fancy that some blow from a Turkish scimitar must have affected his intellect, for him to sink into such unmanly self-indulgence."

"Constancy is not a manly virtue," remarked Sissie.

"Is it not, Sissie?" asked Arnold, again greatly interfering with poor Clement's comfort. "Then I must be very unmanly, for that is my one virtue. I am like the poor Ritter in my incurable longing for something more than 'sister's-love.'"

"You think more highly of the hero in his fighting than in his watching days," continued Dr. Paterson—utterly unsuspicious of the bye-play which was going on under cover of Clement's outstretched form.

"Certainly," answered Arnold. "A man has some right to give his life for his love, but he has no right to sacrifice his self-respect."

"But by giving his life we understand that the object of his love benefits by the

gift. The lady in question would not have benefited by her knight's death."

"Do we always understand that?" asked Arnold, doubtfully.

"Most decidedly. If I say 'I would give my right hand for her,' I mean I would give my right hand to serve her."

"And if *I* say 'I would give my right hand for her,'" cried Arnold, fixing upon Sissie eyes full of passionate feeling, "I mean that I would give my right hand—more, I would give my left hand, the hand nearest my heart, and my heart, too—not only to serve her, but because my love for her makes me miserable if I cannot give her all I have, and makes it my greatest joy to suffer for her."

This was getting rather too much for Sissie, and she was relieved when Dr. Paterson announced that they had reached Bonn, and he must say "Good-bye."

"So soon!" cried Arnold. "I had for-

gotten all about time and distance! Then you will write to me directly you come to England?"

"And you will come and see us at Monk's Own," said Sissie, "and let papa thank you better than I can."

"And I hope I shall find my first patient quite robust again," returned the young man, as he hurried away.

Those he left were far past any ordinary topics of conversation. "Sissie," Arnold began, in low, tremulous tones, as soon as their friend was out of sight, "I have lost all reason and prudence; you have said some things, and looked some things within the last half-hour, that have turned my brain. I must risk all once more. Tell me, if I were now to ask you to marry me, would you answer as you did fifteen months ago?"

"No," whispered Sissie.

"Would you say that it was possible for you to love me?"

"Wait, Arnold," Sissie managed to get out. "Only wait a week, or perhaps a fortnight, and I will say anything you like."

"Why not say it now?" cried Arnold, drawing still closer to her as he spoke. "Say it now, Sissie. Say you love me."

Sissie shook her head.

"Sissie, you don't understand it yet," said Arnold, sadly. "I shall be told once more of that cruel 'sister's-love!'"

Sissie shook her head again—this time with a smile which somewhat reassured Arnold. "Then if I wait a week——"

"Perhaps a fortnight," put in Sissie.

"If I wait a week, or a fortnight, you will tell me that you love me really; not like a brother; not as you love, or could love, any one else in the world; but in some degree as I love you; with a love that makes you all the world to me, and makes all the world full of you?"

"Yes," answered Sissie, almost inaudibly,

as Arnold paused, and looked eagerly into her face.

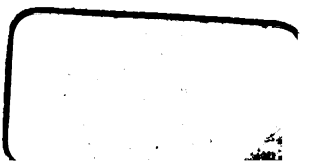
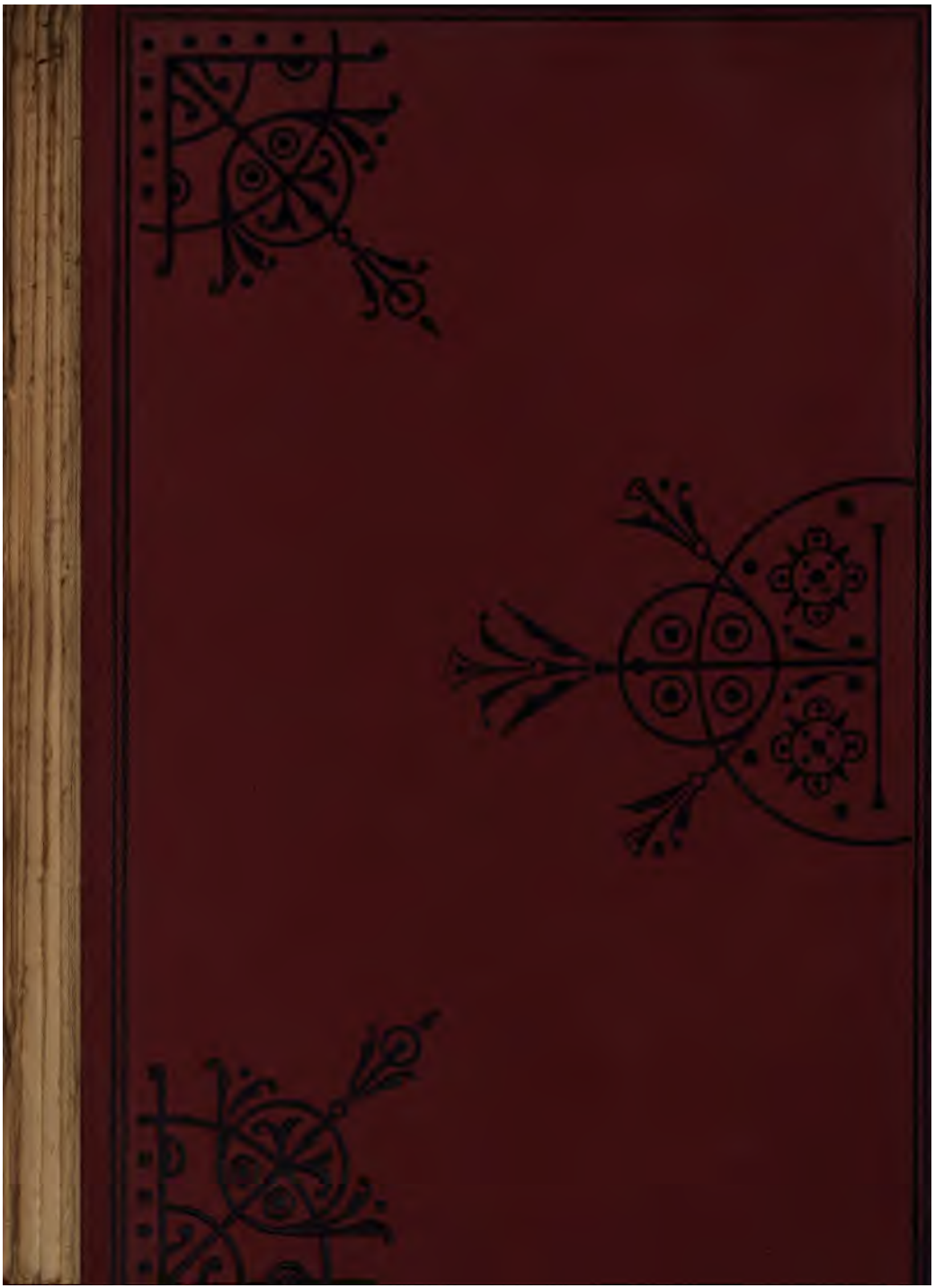
"Why not say it now, Sissie? Think what it would be to me to hear you say it now!"

Sissie shook her head again, gravely, and Arnold was silenced. Presently he said, "One thing you will not deny me. You remember—or, most likely, you do *not* remember—giving me a spray of heather the first time I saw you at a dance. I have kept it ever since—it is always next my heart. Don't laugh!" he cried, as Sissie smiled at the thought. "It *is* scrubby, but I like that, it seems to speak to me of you. But I want a chain to tie my treasure round my neck; will you give me something else? Give me a piece of your hair, a long piece, long enough to make a chain."

Just as Sissie assented, the boat stopped at Cologne, and in a few minutes Sir Percy came on board—having reached Caub the day the others left, and returned by rail to

Cologne. Sissie's first letter had miscarried, and after the receipt of the second he had had to dispose of Edmund before he could start.

The next morning, when Arnold and Sissie met in the breakfast-room, before Sir Percy came down, Sissie placed in Arnold's hand a slip of paper. Arnold opened it, and seeing the long fair tress, gave a cry of delight, and kissed it passionately. That night the travellers reached Ostend, and the next day they were in London. As Arnold parted from Sissie at the Paddington station, she going to Cover-heath, and he with Sir Percy to rejoin Edmund at Monk's Own—he said, "Remember, in a fortnight, at the farthest, I am to have my answer. And, Sissie, remember, too, that on that answer depends the happiness or misery of my whole life. It is no light matter."

END OF VOL. II.

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